FILM QUARTERLY

Film Quarterly

FILM CULTURE | DIGITAL | BOOKS & DVDS

ATOM EGOYAN:
CHLOE

ELIA SULEIMAN:
THE TIME THAT REMAINS

DANIÈLE HUILLET
AND JEAN-MARIE STRAUB

HOLLYWOOD
AND EMPIRE

BOLOGNA, CANNES,
TRIBECA

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET, THE OATH, TREME

Volume 64 Number 1

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THE KRAKEN WAKES

***Wild Grass* (Alain Resnais)**
***Around a Small Mountain* (Jacques Rivette)**

At one point in *Wild Grass*, the protagonist Georges is typing at his desk late at night. As Mark Snow's wistful music plays, the camera commences a slow tour of the room, encompassing a picture, a lamp, bookshelves, and an African mask on the shadowy wall. When it reaches the heavily draped window, though, we realize that time has been compressed; suddenly it is morning outside. His wife enters and greets Georges fondly. It is such a graceful shot. It could belong to a cohesive and humane film in which art (personified by the eager typist) masters space, condenses time, and rejoices in the unity of a loving couple. But *Wild Grass* is not that film. Consider, just for a start, the unseen narrator's commentary on the scene (adapted from Christian Gailly's novel, *L'Incident*), which describes a disordered and suggestible mind: "He kept writing about what he believed his life to be. He ended up believing it. No, he believed it. He wrote it, so he believed it." Notice too the simple fact that the camera spends as much time on objects as characters. Starting with its title, *Wild Grass* subverts anthropocentrism. The film opens with a series of oddly impersonal images: vegetation, the back of a woman's spiky hairdo, designer shoes, a stolen handbag swinging from an invisible thief's hand. The mobile viewpoint for some of these initial shots is only slightly above the ground. No person is watching down there. The camera seems to occupy the position of a scurrying creature—its creepy gaze is bestial.

It is a reminder that Resnais is scornful of humanity elsewhere too. In *My American Uncle*, characters are equated with rats in electrified boxes being conditioned by a pompous scientist. The theme of coercion is reinforced by a series of movie-clip match cuts, the archival action seeming to hypnotically dominate Resnais's characters much as pop songs possess the actors in his Dennis Potter tribute, *Same Old Song*: people are represented as puppets or ventriloquist's dummies, mindless playthings reflexively obeying commands. He revisits the caged-animal idea more obliquely in *Private Fears in Public Places*. A scene in which a realtor shows someone around a property is filmed from above so that the dividing walls resemble lab containers; partitions and screens appear in other rooms as well.

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People are like electroshocked vermin in a medical research project. Though this implication is disturbingly dehumanizing, it still assumes a detached observing intelligence and Resnais mocks this epistemology. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit rightly state in *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Harvard University Press) that *My American Uncle* "ruthlessly reduces theoretical discourse itself to one of its own cinematic fictions." Nowhere is this more apparent than in the scenes of grotesque comedy in which, far from being separated in an empiricist hierarchy, human and animal actually combine. Characters sprout rodent heads. These invading chimeras from myth or science fiction are not scientifically knowable, unless by scientists who have themselves grown mutant eyes. There is another incursion in *Same Old Song*. During the culminating cocktail party, translucent jellyfish float across the screen as if this designer residence were submerged in a black lagoon. An even more uncanny sight follows: shocked to learn that the apartment will soon be overlooked by a new building, the hostess howls in indignation and as she does so the disgusting limbs of an octopus are superimposed on her face so that she is for an instant a slimy and demented Medusa. This is the frightful hybrid face of Resnais's inhuman imaginings.

There are no such beasts in *Wild Grass*; instead it is the cinematography itself—flailing, soaring, scuttling, cavorting, assailing—that is monstrous. Take two of the most unexpected shots. Toward the end, Georges looks to his left, where we know the object of his parsimonious desire is sitting. The camera whirls round until it reaches her face, which is spotlit in close-up. What occurs next is incredible: she recoils, jolted. The camera has slapped her! Any account of this crazy shot will have to be strange, so I hesitate only for a moment before suggesting that it is as though a giant octopoid tentacle had gained control of the camera before lashing out at poor Marguerite. Shortly after, something just as eerie and hostile occurs. For the second time Georges is seen with his eyes shut, moving backward in the direction of a cinema entrance. Perhaps he is in a cinephile trance, being transported blissfully into the uterine auditorium. He is not tumbling, however, and he is not using his own limbs either. What is happening to him, then? Faced with the extreme peculiarity of the effect, it makes as much sense as anything else to claim that an oozing prodigy, having paralyzed Georges with its poisonous suckers, is shoving him into its lair. Unless its mon-

Mutant observations

Top two: *My American Uncle*. © 1980 Philippe Dussart, Andrea Films. DVD: Arrow Films (U.K.).
Middle two: *Same Old Song* [*On connait la chanson*] © 1997 Arena Films, Camera One, France 2 Cinéma, Vega Films, Greenpoint. DVD: Pathé Distribution (U.K.).
Bottom two: *Wild Grass* © 2008 F Comme Film, Studio Canal, France 2 Cinéma, Bim Distribuzione. DVD: Studio Canal (France).

strosity is acknowledged—a monstrosity evoked for the last time by the mysterious little girl at the end of the apocalyptic and absurdist coda to *Wild Grass*—Alain Resnais's marvelous film will be unfathomable.

⁂

Both *Wild Grass* and Jacques Rivette's *Around a Small Mountain* follow mercurial middle-aged love affairs. But whereas Resnais depicts a perverse charade, Rivette presents a secular parable in which people carefully invent a healing ceremony. Jane Birkin plays a performer who returns from exile to her family's tiny country circus. Fifteen years earlier she was banished because of her involvement in a fatal accident. She is haunted by the memory. "It's unbearable," she says. "It's too hard." By chance she meets a wandering Italian whom she charms. He starts to delve into her past and finally hatches a plan to lift the burden from her by administering (as he puts it) a shock. "You hurt me," she says of his questioning, but despite the language this is a warm and tender film. Its signature technique is the lateral establishing shot: the camera travels slowly a couple of meters along a track or executes a semi-circular pan. Asserting no great mastery of time and space, never completing a circle, *Around a Small Mountain*'s camera does not pounce or rise to dizzying heights. Its motion is more restricted, benign, and affectionate—the movement of a host welcoming friends with a gesture or of a compère who flourishes an arm while bowing to the audience. Some may find *Around a Small Mountain* stilted; I found it a lovely, poignant fable about reconciliation, powerful enough to subdue demons and monsters.

Rob White

EMPIRE OF THE FATHER

***Killers* (Robert Luketic)**
***Alice in Wonderland* (Tim Burton)**
***Kick-Ass* (Matthew Vaughn)**

Some thirty years ago, in "Dream of the Wise Child," Ann Douglas noted that a considerable swath of commercial literature from the 1970s was given over to the repeated but often ignored proposition that children are not innocents so much as malign creatures, intransigently evil. It is not overly taxing to historicize this in relation to the signal crisis of U.S. decline, bracketed by the global paroxysm of 1968 and economic disaster of 1973, the first shivers of doubt about the American future. Cinema is scarcely divorced from this account; to those two dates, after all, belong *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist*. The children, one might say, bore within themselves an oncoming era considerably less rosy than the long post-war boom.

At the far end of that era—that is, after a couple generations of decline and amid a more terminal crisis—things look a bit different. The disaster is not busy being born, but fully inherited. In the terror twilight of the twentieth century's long day, it's the parents and especially the fathers who bear the onus of imperial decline.

The adducing of dad to empire is neither an original nor Herculean task. It gets interesting when the complex of formulations, substitutions, confusions, and anxieties takes on not just a new urgency but begins to constitute a new understanding, a dawning grasp of a changed situation (and, of course, the desire to resolve problems onscreen that can't be wished away on our side of the looking glass). It is here we find ourselves.

The exaggerations of the action–adventure genre, evererstwhile in pushing the symbolic toward the literal, make a useful starting point in sketching the new field of fatherhood and empire. The clearest case is that indicative post-9/11 vision wherein the heroic father, synthesizing a commitment to family with a passion for country (the two domestic ethics, we might say), must rescue his daughter from not just villains but actual terrorists (if there is a lord of this subgenre it is surely *Live Free or Die Hard*, though television's *24* has read the same bloody tea leaves with considerable intensity).

If one were drawing a semiotic square, the initial contraries would be dad and terrorist; the kid is finally more a convenience than a character, a structural mediator to connect opposed terms. Hero dad is where patriotism and humanism meet. Indeed, they turn out to be one and the same. The terrorist, contrarily, is neither patriot nor human: an America-hating sociopath.

Comedy, of late, seems to be clustering around a parallel contrivance: the farce of paternity. Again, the plot device is no news. Nonetheless, the story means differently in different situations. A historical study would have to address primogeniture, secularization, rising divorce rates, entrance of mothers into wage labor, and so forth. But the complex of historical contexts does not obscure the developing structure of our present landscape. The current cluster of paternity comedies often enough turns on the vagaries of artificial insemination: consider Jennifer Lopez's *The Back-Up Plan*, Jason Bateman's *The Switch*, and Lisa Cholodenko's *The Kids Are All Right*, all in 2010.

The anxieties that mobilize these stories are not monolithic. Surely they concern the traditional family, struggles over gay marriage, the perceived erosion in the gendered division of labor, and more. Behind much of this lurks the impersonal or even inhuman character of technology, which is not simply the precondition for such narratives but a stand-in for the broader alienations of instrumentalized modernity and its still-intensifying logic. If the factory at once allowed for and threatened the American family in the 1950s, now it's the test tube, intrauterine insemination, boutique fertility drugs. The old-fashioned turkey baster comes to seem, relatively speaking, almost cuddly.

Such movies are condemned to affirm the noble conclusion that the true father is the one who loves the child in the appropriately paternal fashion (it needn't be a man, naturally). This surely is the heart of liteness: a kind of liberal uplift about the human decency, masking a rather desperate reassurance that everyone has a big daddy somewhere to watch over them, and he will reveal himself within an hour or two.

Even comedies whose hijinx are directed elsewhere find themselves tempted into ringing this liberal grace note: *Get Him to the Greek*, the latest Judd Apatow-produced homo-

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Broken guns
Killers. Courtesy of Lionsgate.

social epic (surely it is Apatow himself who is perpetually *going Greek*), has a strikingly irrelevant paternity mystery, regarding the dissolute rocker Aldous Snow and his son Naples, who is otherwise entirely absent from the plot. Well, perhaps not all that irrelevant: the strand means to humanize Snow. Preserved from the action genre is the insistence that freely chosen fatherhood is the very mark of humanity. Cough *Knocked Up* cough cough.

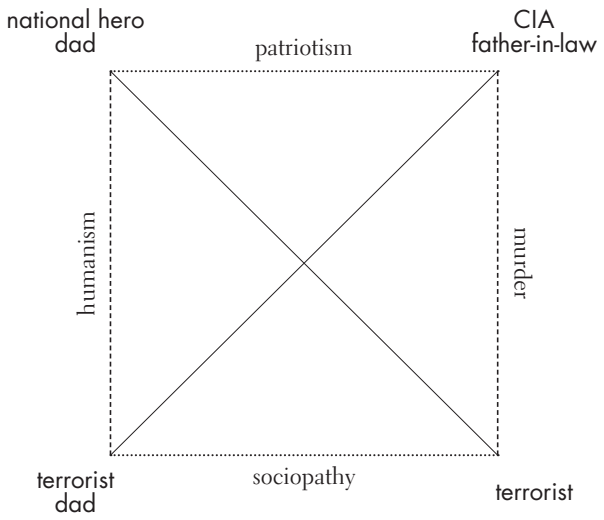
If the action flick's overt theme of nationalism seems to have fallen out of our semiotic schema when applied to comedies, this is but a temporary seeming. One need only peer down toward another corner of the square, adjacent to both the corners already noted. Such an intersection appears at first implausible: a remorseless killer who is also a flag-draped father. Is this even imaginable: the not-terrorist not-dad, a character who is patriot and not, pater and not?

Why not? Comedy, after all, concerns itself not with exceptions to the structure, but with surprise solutions which satisfy seemingly impossible structural demands. Meet the CIA father-in-law. If said structuralist solution seems vanishingly neat, one must be even more taken by the fact that it is far from unique. Taking as its locus classicus *The In-Laws* (Peter Falk as possible CIA agent and incipient father-in-law), the recent decade has offered, to name a few, *Meet The Parents* (Robert De Niro as possible CIA agent and incipient father-in-law), a remake of *The In-Laws* (Michael Douglas as etc.) and now *Killers*, with Tom Selleck taking on the curious duties.

Killers, more than the others, concerns how the government and the family are finally phantasms of each other. Spencer Aimes (Ashton Kutcher) is in effect a child of the state, which recruited him out of college and turned him into a contract killer, highflying and unnaturally sophisticated but always playing a role—a life he has since renounced with some difficulty and only halfway, leaving the government in the lurch so as to reconstruct a domestic existence.

Aimes has no father, and his handler (Martin Mull), the thinnest shadow of a father figure, ends up dead—assassinated after going rogue, it will turn out, by Mr. Kornfeldt (Selleck), who is not only Aimes's comically threatening father-in-law

Hollywood's Semiotics of Paternity and Imperialism



but, inevitably, an "old school" company asset. Orphaned Aimes has effectively married back into the state, which will indeed become a real family; wrong is set right, and life resumes. This happy conclusion is secured when he and his wife deliver a grandchild (through which Aimes and the Kornfeldts become blood relations)—a child Spencer will one day be called upon to rescue, no doubt, from terrorists.

Such substitutions render transparent the occasion for the current cluster of paternity narratives. If dad is the U.S. government (in both terrifying and caring guises, in-law and true dad), stories of uncertain paternity evince a certain doubt about the once almighty state, its status, and its caretaking capacities: a subgenre within the growing Cinema of Empire Declining.

But "the state," as we are all too aware, doesn't quite get it right. The CIA's argot—"the company," "asset" etc.—is resonant for a reason: the substitution of father and empire is not all there is to it. Not at all. For there must also be a third exchangeable term: in short, the company.

The exchange between sovereign political state and vast import–export business is of course the truth of the first truly modern empire, that arm of the East India Company known as Great Britain. Moreover, this is the only model we have for a historical and global empire that has suffered the expiration that the U.S. currently confronts. This is not the secret but more or less explicitly the frame narrative of *Alice in Wonderland*, the blunt maneuverings of which veer closer to comedy than it intends.

The latest *Alice* is set when our heroine is nineteen. Her father makes an early appearance as a dashing yet tender import–exporter—and is killed off post haste. The company is doomed, and Alice is pushed to wed the son of his business partner just to make her way in the world—prefacing the main action in Underland. This column would scarcely be the first to draw forth the economic allegories of Lewis Carroll's land down under. But no need for allegories; things up here are plain enough.

When Alice returns overground, she declines marriage and instead goes into business with her dad's old partner. You see, she has borne back from the reverse side of the world one impossible, imaginative idea: a heretofore ignored trade route that will rescue *the company*, restore it to its former glory, and perhaps more. She will, in short, realize her father's ambitions even in his death. And lest we miss that this resurrection is not of the father but of empire as such (also invoking with thudding obviousness our present imperial precarity), the film's punch line—the source of this new wealth and restored vitality—turns out to be China, where every projected future of the American empire now must lodge itself, dead or alive.

By now the transfers are getting . . . not messy, exactly, for their logic never really wavers. But there are a lot of them, structures laid on structures. Dad is empire, in both its remorseless and humanist guises. The business of empire is business. But this Capital Empire Dad is uncertain, at risk, deathward—something drastic must be done, something out of this world. If *Alice* does not offer a clear enough formulation, there is another, so direct as to be frankly awe-inspiring.

It lies at the core of *Inception*, the latest festival of spectacular intricacy from Christopher Nolan. The title refers to the crime at the center of what is finally a very elaborate caper flick: the act of implanting a single idea in a person's mind, an idea that person will pursue as if it were his own revelation. The idea is to be implanted in mind of the heir to a mighty energy corporation, one so mighty it is likened to a superpower. When we arrive at this singular idea, it is scrawled on a corporate whiteboard in all caps, the primal imperative for the new New World: I WILL SPLIT UP MY FATHER'S EMPIRE.

If it seems the opposite solution to Alice's *I will restore my father's empire*, it must still be seen as an unblinking version of the exact same problem: what is to be done about the passing away of Capital Empire Dad? Both movies, for their adventurous darkness, still pretend there is an answer out there (in a curiously literal sense: both movies, strikingly, must construct incredibly elaborate nightmare worlds just to imagine there could be a place containing an actual answer to this impossible question).

But there is at least one more angle on the problem. We haven't yet filled in the remaining corner of the semi-

otic square—the one between dad and terrorist, at the opposite corner from CIA father-in-law. To satisfy these requirements, we would need a still more implausible character: terrorist dad. Loving, protective, true—but still an outside-the-law killing machine. Which brings us, with rictus grin, to *Kick-Ass*.

Kick-Ass was condemned by Jonathan Rosenbaum in the last issue as a particularly crude exemplar of the Tarantine revenge fantasy, lacking in entrails or consequences. Such movies, it was argued, irresponsibly provide a convivial mental landscape for the delusory belief in bloodless wars of aggression, and thus offer ideological succor to U.S. imperialism. This is probably right. It is certainly a more insightful attack than the superficial condemnation of the film for placing foul language in the mouth of an eleven-year-old girl.

But there is something peculiar about *Kick-Ass*, which evades that logic and takes an even darker view on the matter of Capital Empire Dad (or at least a clearer one, which may amount to the same thing). There are three main kids, each with a dual identity: Dave Lizewski/Kick-Ass, Mindy Macready/Hit Girl, and Chris D'Amico/Red Mist. Of the six requisite parents, two mothers are killed off before the narrative opens; the other scarcely appears. Which leaves the three fathers. Again, one is barely there; like the surviving mom, he is entirely absent from the film's second half, including the ending. Which leaves two dads: the crime boss Frank D'Amico, and ex-cop Damon Macready, who is also the crimefighter known as, no one will be surprised to learn, Big Daddy.

Intimations of mortality
Kick-Ass. Photo: Daniel Smith. © 2009 Universal Pictures International.

Imperial bedroom
Alice in Wonderland. © 2010 Disney Enterprises Inc. DVD: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (U.K.).

It is these latter two we might expect to occupy our first two poles, dad (of the patriotic humanist variety) and terrorist. Strikingly, neither slots into these roles; nor are they versions of CIA father-in-law. Both, in fact, turn out to hold down the fourth corner: loving dad as driven and indefatigable killer. This is Capital Empire Dad at his most fearsome: sociopathic, beholden to no law but his own, carried along by some absolute compulsion he can do nothing but embody. It is uncertain whether we might see post-millennial America better in the panicked megalomania of the mafioso, unable to enforce his will through any methods other than torture and reflex killing; or the vigilante assassin with the inhuman demeanor. These are the two dads on offer, two visions of imperial capital in its death drive, with all inhibitions removed.

The children will have to fend for themselves. For if this sort of father is the novelty of *Kick-Ass*, it is not the heart of its peculiarity. This, rather, lies in a singular fact: both these dads are killed off, spectacularly. It is a film in which parents do not survive. Dads especially. By the end, there is none left standing.

The film's irresponsibility, one might say, is its point. There isn't anyone taking care. *Kick-Ass*, caricatural as it may be, reverses Douglas's tale: those children of 1973 are the parents now. Capital Empire Dad has gone off the rails, pathologically murderous, unable to protect anyone, unable to preserve his own empire. Sure he loves us, the movie suggests. But he has greater and more ruinous impulsions now. Because of this, the movie's logic insists, he has to die.

JOSHUA CLOVER is a 2010–11 Fellow at the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University, researching a book on poetry and political economy.

CURIOSITIES

***Double Take* (Johan Grimonprez)**
***Perrier's Bounty* (Ian Fitzgibbon)**
***The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (Kim Ji-Woon)**
***Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* (Jessica Oreck)**

Watching *Double Take*, an extraordinary film by Belgian director Johan Grimonprez (from a story by British author Tom McCarthy) was one of the oddest experiences I've ever had in a movie theater. The continuous rapidity of the scenes passing before my eyes (and of the sounds impinging on my ears) eventually induced a kind of hypnagogic state in which the film seemed to be accelerating while my vision of its flickering scenes was switching off and on at a rate of about once a second—an experience that ended as soon as the film was over and my vision (along with any other neural or sensory changes involved) returned to normal. Surprisingly, I had been able to make reasonably legible notes throughout.

The film's images are always on the move and are often distorted, truncated, and overlapping even when it's easy to see what they're depicting. They consist of two concurrent series of events. One (more visually distorted than the other) focuses on excerpts of major East–West incidents during the Cold War—such as the kitchen debate between Nixon and Khrushchev and the standoff between Kennedy and Khrushchev over Soviet missiles in Cuba. Meanwhile the other series focuses on Hitchcock, offering many brief examples of his work as a filmmaker and TV entertainer during the same tense period. The sardonic verbal touches of unease and horror in Hitchcock's TV introductions and postscripts fit well with *Double Take*'s visual distortions of the Cold War encounters.

Since Hitchcock died in 1980, Grimonprez extends his life by using at least one convincing lookalike—thus bringing in further opportunities for sinister playfulness, uncertainty, and entertaining confusion. But the living Hitchcock had from time to time also made films that were more deeply disturbing than usual, such as the lengthy scenes of near-darkness in *Strangers on a Train*, the slow tempo and play with mysticism in *Vertigo*, and the nonhuman cast members of *The Birds*. *Double Take*'s references to some of Hitchcock's later and less interesting films, especially *Torn Curtain* and *Topaz*, connect again with the Cold War but for just once in

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Ron Burrage, Hitchcock impersonator
Double Take. Photo: Kristien Daem. Courtesy of Kino International.

Grimonprez's extraordinarily wide-ranging focus they are too brief and colorless to add any impact. Except of course that I still remember them.

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The Anglo-Irish *Perrier's Bounty* has an interesting cast (including Cillian Murphy, Jim Broadbent, Brendan Gleeson, and Jodie Whittaker) and a screenplay that its producer describes as "dark, funny, and romantic." It does indeed offer some effective night shooting, but neither it nor the daylight scenes evoke a lot of romance. Almost right at the start there is Brenda, so angry with having just been dumped by her boyfriend that when she finds her neighbor Michael being maltreated by a henchman of a powerful gay crook named Perrier to whom Michael owes a thousand quid, she grabs a gun and shoots the henchman. After Brenda and Michael go on the lam the latter's apparently rolling-stone father turns up convinced that if he falls asleep he'll die, but fortunately the film's generally rowdy action manages to keep him alive.

There's a lot of that action, along with a continual buildup of tension and curious situations such as Michael and Brenda outwitting and sidelining two policemen in order to save themselves from the crook's heavies. Action is long while the time to appraise it is short. Occasionally it's vice versa, as when Brenda and Michael are hiding out on a hill at night overlooking the lights of Dublin. *Perrier's Bounty* is something of a roller-coaster ride all the way to its baffling happy end.

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The Good, the Bad, the Weird, an aptly titled South Korean film by Kim Ji-Woon, left me baffled and exhausted but also somewhat impressed. There were four people (including me)

Japanese entomology
Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo. © 2009 Myria Productions LLC.

at the first New York City press screening and not one of us walked out. When (as here) a sequence right at the beginning of a 140-minute film opens with a mid-desert double train crash that leads on the spot to chases, clashes, multiple shoot-outs between three men on the make as they grab what they can from the train's government officials before heading to other sandy parts, you realize that the filmmaker has either shot his bolt or is able to keep on raising the tension until the end. Whatever else he may lack, Kim has that ability.

He doesn't have quite the same ability to make it continually clear who is who and what they're saying, but that can be a problem with any subtitled film involving a large number of angry or forceful people, especially if some are meant to be Russian or Chinese as well as Korean. Although the film may never be used to teach history, it did prompt me as soon as I got home to look up the historical background from which Kim had whipped up this rich confection.

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Despite its comic-strip title, its visual extravaganzas, and its ear-popping soundtrack, *Beetle Queen Conquers Tokyo* is not a wild attempt at science fiction. It is simply a brilliant documentary that occasionally looks and sounds like science fiction. Directed by the American entomologist Jessica Oreck it gives a vivid account of the longtime attachment between the Japanese people and such flying insects as beetles, crickets, dragonflies, fireflies, cicadas, and so on. At the beginning of the film we see two young men collecting popular insects to sell, dislodging them from the tops of not very tall trees by thumping on the trunks. At the end of the film one of the men drives away in a Ferrari he just bought with the income from his latest insect sales.

In city scenes the camera winds its way through alleys filled with insect-sellers and buyers and the occasional child's tragedy ("All my crickets have escaped, can you help me find them?"). For nearly everyone else in the film, however, the mostly flying insects are sources of pleasure and joy. All the same, Oreck's film reminds us that centuries ago an emperor dubbed Japan "Isle of Dragonflies" and that early samurai respected dragonflies for their martial valor.

Children (girls as well as boys) may be the most obviously enthusiastic of insect aficionados, but parents aren't far behind. In one lengthy sequence a group of families and friends celebrate together at night with large bonfires whose rising sparks illuminate and seem to dance with the hovering insects. I certainly can't forget the smiling man who watches a firefly fluttering around, comments that it is always changing, and adds, "it could be a deceased relative."

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MEN IN TROUBLE

***Lebanon* (Samuel Maoz)**
***Eyes Wide Open* (Haim Tabakman)**

Whereas the Israeli–Palestinian conflict receives great attention in the wider world, tensions within Jewish culture often preoccupy Israelis just as much. The rare coincidence of two prizewinning Israeli fiction features opening in London during May 2010 offers a chance to focus on internal differences, such as that between the secular majority and the religious minority, that have rarely seemed more acute.

Lebanon by Samuel Maoz and *Eyes Wide Open* by Haim Tabakman, both first-time feature directors, could not be more different, or so it would first appear. Viscerally exciting and distressing, Maoz's self-scripted film follows four young recruits in the first days of the war of 1982; and formidably daring in its execution, it confines us and them within a tank, with exteriors seen only through the crosshairs of a viewfinder. Autobiographical and cathartic for the director (who lends his own nickname to the traumatized gunner, Shmulik), *Lebanon*'s claustrophobic mise-en-scène and first-person shooting style could hardly be more personal.

While *Lebanon* stages scenes of fast-moving action with brilliant economy, *Eyes Wide Open* reads more like a slow-motion melodrama. As we watch, a tentative love affair develops between two ultra-Orthodox men in Jerusalem: student Ezri (played by pop and TV star Ran Danker) and butcher Aaron (played by Zohar Strauss, who is also a steely commander in *Lebanon*). Less formally innovative than *Lebanon*, still *Eyes Wide Open* has an eye for visual detail and a subtly crafted sound design: the camera catches a black hat rolling in the rain as the two men meet and their dialogue plays against a constant background of songs, prayers, and traffic noise. Although Tabakman claims to find his project deeply personal, he was shooting from a script that was not his own and has confessed to being neither gay nor religious himself. And where *Lebanon* is limited to just one viewpoint (that of the youthful soldiers, however much they may bicker), *Eyes Wide Open* gives us two contrasting looks: the gaze of the religious community, fearful for its members, and that of Aaron, a respectable married man hypnotized by a same-sex passion that can lead him only to disaster.

In spite of these differences, the two films have much in common, beyond the fact that they were part funded by Israeli cable operator HOT. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, for films from a small country surrounded by enemies, they focus on the common theme of confinement. Trapped in the tank interior, soldiers (and spectators) are alternately bored and terrified. The single set, cunningly contrived in a studio, takes on a life of its own, with the tank leaking its own body fluids of water and oil, just as the soldiers exude sweat and urine, and giving voice to mechanical groans and shrieks, even as the crew remain in stunned silence. The grating sound of the gun turret as it (as the camera) pans and tilts is especially ominous, heralding as it does shots of the horrors of war that often seem strangely detached from the soldiers, who are still nonetheless deeply and traumatically implicated in the scenes they view outside.

Offscreen sound is also vital here. At one point an unseen helicopter hovers deafeningly above the boys; at another music booms out inexplicably from invisible and deadly adversaries. Claustrophobic community (the crew members sweat and piss, chat and argue) is shattered by the sudden intrusion of unwelcome visitors: a dead comrade, who was killed because of Shmulik's reluctance to fire on an enemy car, and a captive Syrian soldier, who is taunted by a murderous Phalangist. In this tiny space men's bodies come all too close for comfort: at one point a crew member gingerly helps the shackled Syrian to pee.

Tabakman's black-garbed Haredi are if anything more constrained than their secular conscript cousins. Certainly their uniform is more confining. And Jerusalem seems less golden than sodden here. Pouring rain keeps Aaron cloistered in his bleak butcher's shop (bloody chickens hang from the ceiling) or in the small home he shares with his growing brood and attentive wife (the wonderfully named Tinkerbell Ravit Rozen). When the two men finally make love it is in a cramped room above the shop. The only escape from their claustrophobic neighborhood is when Ezri lures Aaron to a ritual bath in a waterhole. In spite of the scene's Edenic nudity (handsome Ezri wastes no time in

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stripping off), the landscape remains stubbornly stony, hardly a rural idyll. Back home the community is relentlessly intrusive, gossiping about the couple even before they have fumbled their way to illicit love. Elsewhere a (forbidden) television is hidden in a closet, the sure sign of an enclosure that is as much cultural as spatial.

Confinement thus coincides with conflicting modes of masculinity. In *Lebanon* male comradeship flickers among the stressed and distressed soldiers when one mentions his mother or another gives an oddly eroticized account of the death of his father. But as the tank plunges deeper into danger, the four crew members, initially differentiated, become more difficult to tell apart: smeared with oil, their faces glow a uniform burnished bronze. The erotic appeal of Israeli men, and most particularly soldiers, is hardly unknown, exploited as it is by still photographers like Adi Nes and Kobi Israel or in Lucas Entertainment's porn epic *Men of Israel*. But, in spite of the homosociality of his all-male setting, Maoz barely allows his characters (or viewers) such sexual consolation. This in spite of the dark good looks of his cast (Oshi Cohen, who plays *Lebanon*'s gun loader, is, like Ran Danker, something of a teen idol: a choice YouTube clip has them dancing together in red boxers).

Visual interest, here somewhat detached from the men, is thus projected onto the surreal landscapes glimpsed outside their circumscribed realm: chickens scatter in panic when Shmulik shells the wrong vehicle; a woman staggers through the carnage in her nightgown; and the viewfinder tilts up to take in an incongruous Eiffel Tower and World Trade Center, images that prove to be posters in a devastated travel bureau. Even the code used by the military is strangely exotic, transforming male labor (and slaughter) into feminine fantasy: casualties are "flowers," fatalities "angels," and tanks and units baptized "Cinderella" or "Cornelia."

The same-sex community of the ultra-Orthodox is also not without its unexpected compensations. Aaron clearly enjoys the male companionship of his study group, with its communal singing and drinking. And Tabakman takes care not to caricaturize here. Thus Aaron's rabbi is no puritan, arguing as he does that God does not ask men to make sacrifices and could not create "broken" people. He even protects Aaron from more zealous (and violent) coreligionists. And Aaron's modestly dressed wife remains tender toward him, even as his shame becomes common knowledge, cradling her husband in her lap at one crucial and moving moment. Clearly Aaron cannot just pick up and leave for the vibrant gay community of Tel Aviv a few miles down the road.

Confined spaces

Top: *Eyes Wide Open*. Courtesy of New American Vision.
Bottom: *Lebanon*. © Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc.

Given their shared ambivalence, it is fitting that both of these fine features should boast such inconclusive conclusions. Fighting their way through the fog of war (the wounded tank groans like the ancient hulk of a ship), the soldiers find themselves marooned suddenly in a sea of sunflowers. Escaping alone from his torment, the butcher returns to the waterhole and is shown for the first time bathing naked. We cannot tell if this is an attempt to wash away his sins or a first unabashed acceptance of erotic pleasure. But whether they are secular or religious, the troubled but compelling men of *Lebanon* and *Eyes Wide Open* have just as surely lost their way.

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MY COUNTRY, MY COUNTRY AND *THE OATH*

Laura Poitras's documentaries shed new light on the "War on Terror" by telling personal stories, seeking what George Packer (an influence on Poitras) calls the "human heart of the matter" ("The Spanish Prisoner," *The New Yorker*, October 31, 2005). Questions of loyalty, betrayal, even love emerge in Poitras's Academy Award-nominated *My Country, My Country* (2006) and *The Oath* (2010), two-thirds of a projected *New American Century* trilogy of films intended to help "American audiences understand the impact of our actions post-9/11" (quotations from Poitras are from interviews I conducted in May 2010). Poitras works in the Middle East, largely alone and at considerable risk, in order to record everyday life in a way that is hardly ever seen in the mainstream news media. She attempts to humanize a reality that is too often distorted by such abstractions as "War on Terror" itself. As Edward Said pointed out in relation to the Iraq invasion in his 2003 preface to *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1979): "Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like 'us' and didn't appreciate 'our' values—the very core of Orientalist dogma as I describe its creation and circulation in this book—there would have been no war." Poitras tries to reduce the otherness of the people directly affected by American decisions and policies: "I think there's a difference between the trauma of our fear post-9/11 versus the reality of having dozens of your friends murdered and killed and of not knowing whether your family is going to be killed. We have no way to comprehend that level of violence."

A sense of the inherent contradiction of invading a country to foster democracy galvanized Poitras to undertake her first solo feature-length project in 2003. She wanted to respond to what she regarded as an "unimaginable, mistaken, and misguided" policy. Up to that point, she had collaborated with Linda Goode Bryant on one long-form documentary, *Flag Wars* (2003), a chronicle of gentrification in Columbus, Ohio. The film won several awards, including a Peabody, and was Poitras's ticket to permission from the U.S. military to make a film about the nation-building program in Iraq. *My Country, My Country* centers on Dr. Riyadh, a dignified, thoughtful Iraqi general practitioner and local Sunni city council candidate. Shot in the months leading up to the 2005 elections, the film (which has no voiceover or talking-head interviews) was "100 percent cinema vérité, following events as they unfolded in real time," including Dr. Riyadh's campaign for a seat on the city council. (*My Country, My Country* ends just after the election, its impact more cosmetic than real, Dr. Riyadh back to doing what he can through his clinic, having failed to win his seat.) In the course of campaign rounds, interactions with his family, and especially while treating patients, Dr. Riyadh deals constantly with the American occupation. Poitras intercuts shots of the U.S. military, Australian private security contractors, and U.N. officials as they plan for the election, their every move heavily guarded, the atmosphere of their conferences (in the Green Zone) insular and isolated. The occupying forces are seen to be a remote and menacing presence, but Poitras is reticent when it comes to showing the extent of urban bombings. The only violence in the film is what's seen on the Riyadh family television. Instead, Poitras shows people discussing how to deal with bombings, checkpoints, and, more than anything else, the lack of basic services and facilities.

In *My Country, My Country*, Poitras dwells on images of daily life in occupied Baghdad: Dr. Riyadh making tea, his kitchen lit only by a kerosene lamp; a military briefing on "Joe Iraqi's" experience of the election; the head of an Australian private security team negotiating with an arms dealer; an elderly Iraqi woman taking her flour ration beneath a paper flier about voting; Dr. Riyadh's few moments of respite as he feeds the family's chickens. The doctor's house and clinic are the hubs of the film, everyday environments of a kind often absent in news reporting. Family life and medical exams continue despite the sound of gunfire or explosions. The doctor consults at least as much on coping with the occupation as on his patients' ailments. (On one occasion he is shown donating his own money to a hard-up patient.) This is observational filmmaking that spurns any "unified point of view or narration that tells the audience what they're seeing" in order to explore the dynamics of the situation. Poitras emphasizes the cultural differences between the U.S. personnel and the locals. Among the most telling scenes is a short exchange between an American election-police trainer and a group of students. The trainer tells the group that it will appear "on TV all over the world . . . in the front row of one of the best shows that's going to be in the world." A student objects to the word "show" and the trainer hastily backs down. It's a brief but telling glimpse both of casual insensitivity and a cultural gulf: the

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Welcome to the occupation
My Country, My Country. © 2006 Praxis Films. DVD: Zeitgeist Films.

thrill of being on TV eludes the Iraqi. Later in *My Country, My Country*, there are shots of Iraqis at polling stations. Poitras was again interested in contrasts: "I was trying to juxtapose the family with the occupying power. After showing video teleconferences where there's not an Iraqi in sight, it felt important to show Iraqis risking their lives to vote. These are people who are dealing with high-stakes stuff and are not necessarily living in a media or Facebook culture."

Poitras succeeds in *My Country, My Country* in rendering crushing statistics of the Iraq invasion—such as the estimated 100,000 Iraqis killed in the war referenced at the end of *My Country, My Country*—less abstract. "There's a whole

generation that's traumatized, that's gone. It's a little shocking that there's been so much destruction, so much of it unnecessary, just basic incompetence. And who's paying the price for that?" Flipping the perspective from top-down to ground-level goes some way to showing on a small and personal scale the real-life consequences of U.S. foreign policy.

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The Oath concerns Abu Jandal, a Sana'a, Yemen cab driver, brother-in-law to Salim Hamdan, the first Guantánamo prisoner to be tried by military tribunal, and Osama Bin Laden's bodyguard in the late 1990s. Poitras follows this voluble, charismatic, contradictory man as he drives his cab, gives religious instruction to his eight-year-old son and some local youths, and reflects on his political and personal commitments—including intense remorse at having recruited Hamdan, who became Bin Laden's driver, to the militant cause. We follow Hamdan's ordeal by means of archive footage, family photographs, and his letters home (which are read out by an actor—letters are the only form of communication for detainees). There are excerpts as well from his trial and from the press conferences of his dedicated defense team. Hamdan remains more cause than character: his "story carries the emotional weight of the film," according to Poitras. "I feel okay (perhaps good) that you never see him because that is the situation with many of those still imprisoned." His missives provide a haunting reminder of his physical absence: "these sparse, forlorn letters that captured the chasm rather than necessarily insight into who this guy is." Though the voiceover readings are wistful at times, sapping Hamdan's words of anger, desolation sometimes comes through strongly: "days and years have gone by, and all I have left is God." The amount of information in play in *The Oath* prompted Poitras and editor Jonathan Oppenheim to irregularly break up the film with white-on-black intertitles. Some are strictly informational, updates on Hamdan's case; others, such as a jihadist oath, more loaded. Poitras says that she wanted to "disrupt the viewing experience" and challenge the spectator.

Hamdan's letters are read against the backdrop of co-cinematographer Kirsten Johnson's soberly beautiful Guantánamo landscapes. Poitras looked for "odd compositions, ominous but almost amateur." Over a five-week shoot, Johnson drew from Trevor Paglen's still photography of U.S. government black sites. (Though artier, Jonathan Olley's *Land Between Two Rivers* also comes to mind; both he and Paglen show what's hidden in plain sight, spots so nondescript they almost disappear.) Poitras encouraged Johnson to "look for evidence in the landscape of a crime that can't be seen." Invisibility is as important as visibility: "At Guantánamo, Kirsten observed Hamdan's trial but couldn't film, so there was also a process of her translating the emotional experience of being in the courtroom to shooting the landscapes." With no orange jumpsuits, no MPs, and no obvious prison enclosures in sight, Johnson's images raise questions, prompt a feeling of uncertainty. The prison intrudes mysteriously on the idyllic landscape. In one panorama, a tangle of barbed wire and an American flag drooping against its pole are just visible at the margin of the image. It could pass for a memorial and the sense of poignancy is heightened particularly by Dawn Upshaw's vocalizing of parts of Osvaldo Golijov's score. Whereas other incidental music in the film described by Poitras as "agitated," Upshaw's music "is just pain." During the Guantánamo sequences, a few soldiers are seen at a distance, running in their civvies, but mostly the shots show unpopulated roads and building exteriors. The one soldier who is observed closely is Hamdan's crisply professional Navy lawyer, Lt. Commander Brian Mizer. He declined to be interviewed for *The Oath*, but is seen on several occasions speaking to reporters in the briefing room. He is plainly distressed over the flawed tribunals. "Someone like Mizer," Poitras says, "who comes out of the military culture, saying that he's defending the constitution is a pretty compelling argument for the problems with military tribunals."

Abu Jandal is a fascinating and complex central presence in *The Oath*. Poitras even describes him as "profoundly surreal." To her translators, he seemed "very intelligent and a little outside the [jihadist] mold they were familiar with." While imprisoned in Yemen in 2001, Jandal claims to have had a change of heart, electing to devote himself to parenting and teaching, and some of the most touching scenes in the film show this strict-but-doting father instruct his son, Habib, in the practice of daily prayers. Yet footage from Al Arabiya and *60 Minutes* appearances show another side to Jandal—a confident ability to handle questioning. Whereas in *My Country, My Country*, Dr. Riyadh is consistently genial and appealing, Abu Jandal can be bewildering, even unsympathetic at times.

When Habib says he hopes to grow up "jihad, like you," Jandal smiles ruefully, saying: "You'll cause a lot of problems for yourself. Your father is fighting the whole world." Born Nasser Al Bahri in Saudi Arabia, Jandal left home at nineteen to fight in Bosnia in 1994; two years later he led a group of jihadists (including Hamdan) to Tajikistan, where Bin Laden invited him to Afghanistan. With some nostalgia, Jandal notes that in Bin Laden he found "the kindness I missed in my father." His eventual promotion to Bin Laden's deceptively affable-sounding "Emir of Hospitality" put Jandal in charge of "evaluating the mettle of each man" who volunteered for Al-Qaeda—including, he says, all nineteen September 11 hijackers. Poitras does not show Bin Laden (seen leading a rally at which Jandal is present and in a brief interview) until

A complex man
The Oath. Courtesy of Zeitgeist Films.

nearly midway through the film. She wanted to avoid the way "certain kinds of images just bounce off. We've seen it before and it doesn't have any emotional weight. By the time you are presented with Bin Laden in *The Oath*, you have enough information that you can process this in a different way."

While imprisoned by Yemeni authorities for his suspected involvement in the USS *Cole* bombing, Jandal was interrogated at length less than a week after September 11 by FBI agent Ali Soufan. Poitras met with Soufan several times; although he refused to appear in the film, we see clips of Senate Judiciary Committee testimony. *The Oath* includes glimpses of Jandal's detailed answers regarding Al-Qaeda protocols, hideouts, and personnel. After Hamdan's arrest, he too was interrogated by Soufan. (An interesting triangular element to *The Oath* is added when, during his committee deposition, Soufan refers to the oath *he* swore "to protect this great nation.")

Jandal's several references to his intense regret about Hamdan seem like more than lip service, yet just where his loyalties lie remains unclear. Asked on Al Arabiya if he has renounced the Al-Qaeda oath—which demands loyalty "regardless of my own self-interest or reasoning"—Jandal hedges: "the issue needs to be vetted by the elders." But he acknowledges death threats (from "new generation" Al-Qaeda members) in the past and admits to continuing worries about his family: "there is no security," he says. Only in his early thirties, he seems to have already lived a full lifetime. In one of Poitras's interviews, Jandal says that, if asked, he would not have taken part in September 11, careful to qualify the answer as personal (from Nasser Al Bahri rather than Abu Jandal). The next day he asks that Poitras delete the statement (which remains in the film). We may not sympathize with the conflict that seems to be taking place in his mind, but a sense of ambivalence, of a radical's struggle with his own beliefs and actions, is powerfully conveyed. Jandal's contradictions balance the somber Guantánamo scenes and the unavoidably complicated details of Hamdan's trials. By respecting though not condoning Jandal and by showing the Guantánamo version of justice, *The Oath* offers a nuanced, powerful, and necessary alternative to the American mainstream take on the "War on Terror."

MEGAN RATNER wrote about *Gomorrah* in the summer 2009 issue.

DVD DATA *My Country, My Country*. Director: Laura Poitras. © 2006 Praxis Films. Publisher: Zeitgeist Films. $19.99, 1 disc.

CREDITS *The Oath*. Director, producer, cinematographer: Laura Poitras. Cinematographer: Kirsten Johnson. Editor: Jonathan Oppenheim. Music: Osvaldo Golijov. U.S. distributor: Zeitgeist Films.

ALONE ON ELM STREET

ADAM LOWENSTEIN ARGUES THAT THE REMAKE OF *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* RENOUNCES POLITICS

"Remember me?"

The question, posed by the psychopathic dream-stalker Freddy Krueger (Jackie Earle Haley) in Samuel Bayer's 2010 remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, is one of the better lines in a film with very few good ones. The words remind us of how the original Freddy (the indefatigable Robert Englund), who was introduced in Wes Craven's 1984 hit and then sliced his way through seven sequels or offshoots over the following two decades, could make us groan and chuckle simultaneously with his half-witty commentary directed more toward the viewer than the victims he teased before the slaughter. One pleasure the largely inert remake does offer is the opportunity to remember Freddy and to revisit our past encounters with him. But what do remembering and forgetting mean in this context? What does the new *Nightmare*, as the latest in a recent wave of remakes of 1970s and 80s horror films, tell us about the changing nature of cinematic horror?

My disappointment with Bayer's film does not stem from a purist's frustration with the way a classic original often gets reduced to an inferior copy, or from a historian's regret that ambitious independent horror films from one era often get defanged by an ever more corporatized, ever less imaginative Hollywood in our own. The horror genre has always thrived on homage, imitation, and the good old-fashioned rip-off. Most of the 1970s and 80s originals that have been remade in the 2000s were themselves heavily indebted to earlier films: *Last House on the Left* to *The Virgin Spring*, *Halloween* to *Psycho*, *Friday the 13th* to *A Bay of Blood*, and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* to *Halloween*. Many of the modern horror film's greatest directors have not been above cannibalizing their own work (sometimes even cannibalizing their own cannibal movies): think of how Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* depends on *Last House on the Left*; how Tobe Hooper's *Eaten Alive* needs *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; how George A. Romero's *The Crazies* and *Dawn of the Dead* and its sequels rely on *Night of the Living Dead* (which itself relied on *The Birds*); how David Cronenberg's *Rabid* revisits *Shivers* (which itself revisited *Night of the Living Dead*). In a striking number of these instances, the reproduction enhances or even outdoes the original.

So I certainly hold open the possibility that today's horror remakes can meet or exceed the accomplishments of their predecessors, even once one allows for the expected mainstreaming that occurs when low-budget, independently produced originals become major studio remakes. Although to my mind only a few of the remakes have succeeded in this regard (Alexandre Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes* stands out, while Rob Zombie's *Halloween* films take some intriguing aesthetic risks), few have been outright artistic failures. And nearly all have performed respectably or even impressively at the box office, indicating that this trend is far from over. I do not believe that every remake conforms to an overarching pattern of diminishing returns, but I would argue that the new *Nightmare* is symptomatic of certain tendencies within the horror remake phenomenon of the 2000s. The new *Nightmare* and its brethren (particularly the reduxes of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Last House on the Left*) often remember the genre-coded sensations of horror generated by the originals, but just as often forget how that horror was embedded in ideas of community that provided the films with a cultural and political urgency. The results are remakes that pay a heavy toll for their nostalgic investments in the horror genre's past: this nostalgia overwhelms opportunities to confront the communal politics of the present.

Compared to the warfare between opposing family units that drives Craven's *Last House on the Left* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, his original *Nightmare* relegates issues of family as community to a smaller supporting role. But it is a crucial

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role nevertheless. Nancy (Heather Langenkamp), our intrepid lead protagonist, is a child of divorce caught between her alcoholic mother (Ronee Blakeley) and stern cop father (John Saxon), both of whom care deeply for her. Nancy's boyfriend Glen (Johnny Depp) has involved parents with an intact marriage, even if his mother and father don't always agree on parenting style. Nancy's friend Tina (Amanda Wyss) has a single mother who appears briefly before taking a Vegas vacation with a boyfriend, and even Tina's "bad" boyfriend Rod (Nick Corri) seems to have parents that show up at his funeral (although they are not explicitly identified as such). In short, some form of parental relation connects all of the main characters, however tenuously, to a community larger than themselves as individuals. In fact, the weaker the family unit, the greater the effort made by friends to fill the void. When Tina is left home alone by her mother and cannot stand the prospect of enduring another nightmare on her own, Nancy, Glen, and Rod stay over to keep her company. When Rod and Tina have sex that night, it is to provide each other with mutual comfort from the nightmares that haunt them both. When Freddy tears Tina apart shortly after and drenches Rod in her blood, Nancy and Glen do not abandon him but insist on seeing him in jail to hear his side of the story (too late to stop Freddy, as it turns out). And it is Rod's funeral, not Tina's, that the town comes out for despite most citizens believing he was a delinquent at best and a murderer at worst.

The new *Nightmare* scales back radically the presence of family and community. Nancy (Rooney Mara) has only a mother; Quentin (Kyle Gallner as the new Glen) has only a father; Kris (Katie Cassidy as the new Tina) has a mother with no boyfriend; and Jesse (Thomas Dekker as the new Rod) has no parents at all. Even more significantly, this shrinkage of parental involvement fails to inspire a corresponding expansion of sociability among the teens themselves. In fact, the ties that bind Nancy, Quentin, Kris, and Jesse are so thin that they nearly vanish. Gone are the visits of Nancy and Quentin to Kris's house and Jesse's jail cell, gone is the sex between Kris and Jesse, gone is the established romantic relationship between Nancy and Quentin (in one telling moment, Nancy pleads with Quentin to talk to her about something, anything, to keep her awake—the following conversation hinges on "What's your favorite color?"). The funeral scene that brings the community together only demonstrates the community's illusory nature. The deceased is Dean (Kellan Lutz), a character we are barely acquainted with, and the exchanges between Jesse, Nancy, Quentin, Kris, Nancy's mom (Connie Britton), and Quentin's dad (Clancy Brown) are all clipped, superficial, or defensive.

At the same time, Nancy's strength and independence, which one might assume would be heightened by this disintegration of friends and family, subside remarkably. Craven's Nancy grew in knowledge, wisdom, and resolve as she integrated the experiences of those around her to combat Freddy—she took on facets of the detective, psychologist, historian, and warrior, even developing a streak of gray hair as a visual sign of her maturation process. In *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, the scholar Carol J. Clover rightly singles out Nancy as "the grittiest of the Final Girls"—those resourceful females who survive a slasher film's trials by outwitting and sometimes even killing the stalker themselves. By comparison, Bayer's Nancy displays very little growth. She has no one in her community to interact with and learn from in any meaningful way, so she spends much of her time alone in her room. Even her partnership with Quentin seems defined by its limitations rather than its content, with their major revelations concerning Freddy happening more often separately than together. When Nancy rises up to kill Freddy at the climax of the new *Nightmare*, hacking away at him physically with a blade and verbally with the silly epithet "bitch," the dramatic impact hardly registers. Nancy's inhabitation of the Final Girl role feels like a perfunctory nod to past genre conventions, not a vital transformation that illustrates the individual's relation to community in the present tense. Her trajectory from unknowing to knowing, from victim to avenger, has been as flat as the threadbare community that surrounds her.

> ***The new* Nightmare *and its brethren . . . often remember the genre-coded sensations of horror generated by the originals, but . . . forget how that horror was embedded in ideas of community that provided the films with a cultural and political urgency.***

The new *Nightmare*'s inability to imagine community is all the more striking in a digital era that offers a plethora of new opportunities for virtual socializing. In fact, one important barometer of the film's preference for the genre markers of the past rather than the communal politics of the present is its failure to explore imaginatively the implications of digital technology. Aside from some unobtrusively placed cell phones, iPods, and laptops, the new *Nightmare* could be set in the 1980s of the original *Nightmare* (Quentin even wears a Joy Division T-shirt) until Nancy surfs the Web rather late

THE *NIGHTMARE* MEMORY BANK

Top six: *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Wes Craven). © 1984 The Elm Street Venture and New Line Productions Inc. DVD: New Line Home Video.
Bottom two: *Alone in the Dark* (Jack Sholder). © 1982 New Line Productions Inc. DVD: Image Entertainment/New Line Home Entertainment.

in the proceedings. Even when she tracks down her former preschool classmates online, it is to no avail interpersonally—they are already dead, with only one leaving behind a videoblog that confirms his death at Freddy's hands. Although not exactly technophobic, the film avoids the original's play with homemade anti-Freddy gadgets (a signature Craven motif) and Nancy's visit to a high-tech sleep clinic. Coupled with the new *Nightmare*'s reliance on and trust in pre-digital photography (the preschool class picture, Kris's missing photo album shots, Freddy's keepsake Polaroids), the remake demonstrates little interest in the way digital technology opens up broader horizons of information access and community organization. This narrative tendency within the film extends somewhat to its mode of production, which involves relatively (and mercifully) light use of CGI.

That being said, the exuberance of the original and its sequels in exploiting the dream theme—gleeful permission to let the stalk-and-slash scenes leave the real world far behind—simply has no equivalent in the new *Nightmare*. Indeed, the dream sequences often feel, somewhat paradoxically, like the film's most derivative moments. In addition to dream scenes that mechanically recapitulate the original, a sea of blood comes courtesy of *The Shining*, a showdown in a closet derives from *Halloween*, and The Everly Brothers' song "All I Have to Do is Dream" echoes the use of Roy Orbison's "In Dreams" in *Blue Velvet*. Even the remake's opening sequence is a dream lifted nearly whole from Jack Sholder's underrated 1982 slasher *Alone in the Dark*. The fact that all of these precursor films come from the 1970s and 80s indicates just how attentive the new *Nightmare* is to channeling sensations of horror audiences experienced watching films from that era. But when it comes to capitalizing on a scene where a computer enters "sleep mode" as a potential pretext for a digitally specific nightmare that could recognize a virtual community, the remake refuses to elaborate.

To be fair, the new *Nightmare* does provide something hovering between an explanation and an excuse for the flatness of its characters and the disconnection of its community: the trauma of child molestation. In Craven's *Nightmare*, the teens had to divine Freddy's origins as a child murderer whom their parents burned alive in a past act of vigilante justice without any direct prior contact with Freddy themselves. In Bayer's *Nightmare*, the teens all knew Freddy once as the kindly caretaker at their preschool. But after their parents decided that Freddy was guilty of molesting the children, the parents killed him without contacting the authorities (and have pretended ever since that the molestations never occurred). None of the teens can remember the molestations, or even the fact that they attended the preschool together. So when the teens start dreaming of Freddy, the visions are at least partially interpretable as repressed memories resurfacing (a diagnosis proffered by Nancy's mother, billed as "Dr. Gwen Holbrook" in the credits but otherwise offering no evidence of being a medical professional—unless wearing glasses counts). The past, in the original *Nightmare*, does not directly determine the present so far as Freddy remains a stranger to the children. But in the remake, the past holds sway and must be reclaimed (as well as avenged) by the children who lived through Freddy's abuse.

When Nancy and Quentin discover old Polaroids in Freddy's preschool lair that chronicle Nancy's molestation by Freddy, the evidence for Freddy's guilt, the children's innocence, and the parents' moral righteousness becomes incontrovertible.

The remake is at its best during a brief interval when the distinctions between dream and memory threaten to collapse, with categories of guilt and innocence hanging in the balance. In a strange sequence that operates somewhere between a dream and a collective memory, Quentin witnesses his father, Nancy's mother, and other parents participate in Freddy's lynching. Haley's performance is especially affecting during this chilling sequence—Freddy's fear, desperation, and incomprehension are even more vivid than the blind rage of the parents. Shortly afterward, Quentin and Nancy confront Quentin's father about the possibility that he and his collaborators may have killed an innocent man who is now returning the favor by visiting the sins of the parents upon the children.

This fascinating suggestion—with its disturbing set of implied questions about just what monstrosity is, where and when it should be located, who exactly is responsible for it, and how might labels of guilty and innocent be distributed in the face of it—finally presents a glimmer of the sort of community critique delivered by the most powerful 1970s and 80s horror films. Is it Freddy or the parents that the children (and we the spectators) should fear most? Did the parents create Freddy or did Freddy incite the parents to act as they did? Is Freddy, a warped amalgamation of parental victimizer and childlike victim, really so different or separate from the parents and children who regard him with such fear and hate? Again, Haley's slight, vulnerable frame and the connotations he carries from his best-known roles as a child in *The Bad*

News Bears and a child molester in *Little Children* are utilized to marvelous effect here, lending real if fleeting weight to these questions.

Bayer bolsters the impact of Freddy's lynching by pairing it thematically with a flashback (initiated by Nancy's mother) to Freddy's early days as the preschool custodian. If Quentin's horrifying vision of mob rule captures the dystopian aspects of a community bound by violence, the flashback presents the film's sole image of a utopian community apparently based on love—from what we can see, the children and Freddy adore each other and play together joyfully. Taken together, these two sequences not only articulate community as a social network that connects the parents, children, and Freddy through shared involvement with communal violence and love, but also refuse to paint the parents simply as good and right versus Freddy as bad and wrong. During this brief moment in the new *Nightmare*, the sickness and evil of Freddy starts to blur with the lies, deceit, and murderousness of the parents, with no clear way to wash our hands of either.

I think the late, great critic Robin Wood was finally too rigid in his influential definitions of normality and monstrosity when he claimed in "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" that the horror film's structure could be boiled down to "normality is threatened by the Monster," but he was right that the best horror films tend to introduce a profound uncertainty regarding our beliefs about what constitutes the normal and the monstrous. Unfortunately, the new *Nightmare* lacks the courage or vision to sustain this sort of uncertainty. By the time the film concludes, any doubt as to whether the parents were justified in their violence against Freddy and their deception of the children has disappeared. When Nancy and Quentin discover old Polaroids in Freddy's preschool lair that chronicle Nancy's molestation by Freddy, the evidence for Freddy's guilt, the children's innocence, and the parents' moral righteousness becomes incontrovertible. Even though we do not see what the photographs show, we witness Nancy and Quentin's agonized reactions to them, as well as a climactic dream scene in which Freddy clothes the teen Nancy in her preschool dress, straps her to a bed, and hisses, "I'm your boyfriend now."

If the new *Nightmare*'s viewers are invited to act as the jury Freddy never met, then the film ultimately presents an open-and-shut case. This trial for viewers is not so much to determine whether or not Freddy is a monster (of course he is, we wouldn't want him any other way), but how the monstrosity embodied by Freddy becomes inclusive or exclusive of the community around him. In Craven's *Nightmare*, where community exists in the present, the community shares in making and breaking Freddy's monstrosity. In Bayer's *Nightmare*, where community is relegated to the past and the present holds only post-traumatic forms of failed community, the townspeople are exonerated of any responsibility for or resemblances to Freddy's monstrosity. There is no living community for Freddy to belong to in the *Nightmare* remake, so Freddy's status as the irredeemable outcast who destroyed that community allows us to rest easy about where monstrosity resides.

By shifting the emphasis away from community, the new *Nightmare*, like so many of its horror remake cousins in the 2000s, remembers horror's form but forgets its substance. This problem takes on a telling spatial concreteness in Bayer's *Nightmare*, where Craven's sure-handed ability to construct a cohesive sense of what a small town looks and feels like—Elm Street as Main Street, USA—completely crumbles. The prosperous suburban homes, decrepit abandoned preschool, sterile urban prison, burnt-out industrial warehouses, and dive of a diner feel like they come from separate movies, not the single Elm Street community of the *Nightmare* remake.

Appropriately enough, Craven's *Nightmare* ends with Freddy returning from the dead to suck Nancy's mother back *inside* the family home, while Nancy, Glen, Rod, and Tina are trapped together in a convertible sporting a top that matches the colors of Freddy's infamous red and green sweater. This final dream is more than one last spectacular gasp before the credits roll—it merges Nancy's wishes (her friends are alive, her mother no longer drinks, Nancy herself has regained her earlier innocent looks) with Freddy's desires (to reassert his presence within Nancy's world, inside her community). Bayer's *Nightmare* concludes with a reanimated Freddy emerging from the other side of a mirror to kill Nancy's mother and *remove* her body from the family home, back to whatever no-place Freddy inhabits. Nancy's "friends," even the surviving Quentin, are nowhere to be found. She screams alone.

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ABSTRACT The 2010 remake of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, directed by Samuel Bayer, is indebted to Wes Craven's 1984 original as well as other predecessors for its horror effects—but it avoids the exploration of community and politics that made the earlier films compelling.

KEYWORDS *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, Samuel Bayer, Wes Craven, horror films, remakes

CREDITS *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Director: Samuel Bayer. Producers: Michael Bay, Andrew Form, Bradley Fuller. Writers: Wesley Strick, Eric Heisserer. Cinematographer: Jeff Cutter. Editor: Glen Scantlebury. Music: Steve Jablonsky. U.S. distributor: Warner Bros. Pictures

TREME VS. *THE BAD LIEUTENANT*

J. M. TYREE REVIEWS TWO CONTRASTING DEPICTIONS OF NEW ORLEANS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

"The real power in this world isn't magic, it's money," confesses the voodoo baddie in Disney's adaptation of *The Princess and The Frog* (2009), set in Jazz Age New Orleans and the environs of the Louisiana Bayou. In tandem with his "friends on the other side," he plans to buy up the city on the cheap—as in any good haunting, it's real estate that matters. In another cartoon feature with a similar setting, *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island* (1998), a song makes the case that uncanniness almost always can be unmasked as the work of banal property interests: "The ghost is a crook in a suit . . . look for the scam." The parade of real (and real-time) horrors emanating from the region—the poisoned city of Norco; the collapsed levees after Hurricane Katrina; the vast plumes of oil gushing until recently from the BP Deepwater Horizon oil catastrophe—have venial, man-made explanations. As Iris (Joanne Woodward) puts it in *The Drowning Pool* (1975) after witnessing a murderous grab of natural resources, "You oil people ruined our town."

In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein developed the idea of "disaster capitalism": mass fright creates opportunities for the consolidation of exploitative power. It is a concept applicable to New Orleans land grabs involving developers hoping to raid the city in the wake of Katrina. "I don't own land, baby, I own the land-mine," raps local Lil Wayne on "New Orleans Maniac," but more elaborate responses are offered by HBO's television series *Treme* (produced by *The Wire*'s David Simon and Eric Overmyer) and Werner Herzog's film *The Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call—New Orleans*. Like a jazz funeral or a street parade honoring marching saints, *Treme* attempts to resurrect a measure of respect in Katrina's aftermath. *The Bad Lieutenant* rejects the notion of a living American city wholesale in favor of a looking-glass abyss. Both productions are set in the wake of the storm, but their competing visions of New Orleans might as well exist in parallel universes. *Treme* represents the place as a fragile but living community of wonders, a sort of ongoing work of performance art which, like the city's music, remains effervescent and improvisational yet brilliantly coherent. The show believes in New Orleans' communal magic, itself becoming a sentimental charm against the nightmares operating in the region. *The Bad Lieutenant*, by contrast, depicts the city pitilessly, presenting a far more corrosive view of a blasted and abandoned territory without community, history, civic structures, or hope.

City of scams

Top: *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island*. © 1998 Hanna-Barbera. DVD: Warner Home Video.
Bottom: *The Big Easy*. © 1986 Kings Road Entertainment Inc. DVD: Lions Gate.

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Season 1 of *Treme* tracks the loosely connected lives of a multiethnic group of musicians, artists, and creative entrepreneurs trying to revive their city, body and soul. Some characters persist while others give up; some overcome steep odds and others despair. The uncertain fate of the city unfolds as a concatenation of these individual choices: New Orleans is a cult that survives or fails depending on an accumulation of belief. On paper, *Treme* ticks every box in the high-minded person's conception of what a contemporary New Orleans drama ought to include. It's socially aware; it's drenched in local color; it's deeply connected to the city's musical pulse; it's a further iteration of David Simon's fictional investigation of the hidden lives of American cities; and it's an all-too-rare platform for superb African American actors, including Wendell Pierce as trombone man Antoine Batiste; Khandi Alexander as bar owner LaDonna Batiste-Williams (Batiste's ex), who spends season 1 searching for her brother, lost in police custody under questionable circumstances since the storm; and Clarke Peters as Albert "Big Chief" Lambreaux, father of a celebrated jazz musician (Delmond Lambreaux, played by Rob Brown), and himself a "Mardi Gras Indian" part of a local cultural phenomenon with multiple layers of ethnic and political complexity.

Treme's self-awareness about its own status as a form of cultural tourism resolves into two tactics: an anxious trashing of other, less knowledgeable tourists and a barrage of local detail—even the city's third oldest restaurant gets a "shout out." The first tactic is already a New Orleans area cliché ("Tourists!" grumbles Snakebite Scruggs in *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island*), while the second casts the show's tone as that of a Baedeker rather than a local's cognitive map, creating the sinking feeling that *Treme* is more keen to convey information than drama. For the most part, outsiders get a drubbing, from a skeptical British journalist who ridicules New Orleans as a has-been city, to the shaming of a Katrina-themed bus tour trawling the broken homes of the Lower 9th Ward, to some Wisconsin church youths seduced into a night of drinking and good jazz, to the smackdown of a local DJ, Davis McAlary (Steve Zahn), himself a sort of racial and musical tourist, who gets punched in the face for dropping the n-bomb. "There's pride on Bourbon Street," winking musicians keep reassuring Batiste when he lands a gig in the French Quarter—cut to his trombone being played at a pole-dancing club. In one telling sequence in episode 5, a Japanese jazz enthusiast, Koichi Toyama (Tatsuo Ichikawa) visits and buys Batiste a new trombone: he seems to know more about certain recordings than the musician, but when Batiste plays for him outside his home, Toyoma chokes up. He models the role of a "good tourist," whereas McAlary represents the local who appears destined to remain outside the magic circle forever. "I taught him everything he knows," McAlary claims about real-life trumpeter Kermit Ruffins to Elvis Costello, "about Keynesian economics!"

Elvis Costello is the real Costello; McAlary is based on musician Davis Rogan; McAlary's "friend with benefits," chef Janette Desautel (Kim Dickens), resembles the star chef at the renowned Bayona restaurant, Susan Spicer. When other celebrity chefs including David Chang show up to admire Desautel's fictional cooking, the circular confusion of reality, authenticity, and celebrity is complete. *Treme* often substitutes relationships to real life and splashes of local color for points of narrative interest, a confused strategy since the show is more of a confection than its plethora of docudrama-ish allusions would suggest. One of the brilliant subjects of Spike Lee's 2006 documentary *When the Levees Broke*, Phyllis Montana-LeBlanc, plays Desiree, the horndogging Batiste's skeptical girlfriend. In Lee's important film, she goes through hell without losing hope: she's angry, witty, and unbreakable. *Treme* relies on its viewers to be in the know and seamlessly import her real biography into the picture—or perhaps Google it later on.

After Katrina, "nobody had the balls to say what was happening," according to radio host Garland Robinette in *When the Levees Broke*. *Treme* strains to do this, but pedantry obstructs its view. The show uses soapbox characters—often in monologue settings in which they are alone, giving television interviews, ranting on YouTube, etc.—to speak directly to the audience. As his daughter Davina (Edwina Findley) drives Lambreaux back into the city for the first time after the storm, she points out that the bridge they're crossing is the notorious spot where fleeing residents were turned back by armed patrols. That exposition is designed to orient the viewer, not Lambreaux, and it sets the tone for a television season smothered by the over-explanation of a know-it-all guide who is beholden to be nice. The viewer should recognize that bridge as a bleak contemporary version of the Edmund Pettus Bridge in 1960s Selma, Alabama, if not from news coverage then from *When the Levees Broke*. Historical fiction, especially historical fiction based upon very recent events, must do much more than bring news already received, in this case via a multitude of nonfiction accounts including, in addition to Lee's remarkable film, the documentary *Trouble the Water*, Dave Eggers's *Zeitoun*, and the oral histories collected in *Voices from the Storm*.

Eggers relates what happened to a Syrian American, Abdulrahman Zeitoun, when he got temporarily lost in a bureaucratic nightmare of police custody, and *Treme*'s plotline

TREME: COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Photos: Paul Schiraldi. Courtesy of HBO Media Relations.

Beyond the French Quarter

Top: *The Big Easy*. © 1986 Kings Road Entertainment Inc. DVD: Lions Gate.
Bottom: *Tightrope*. © 1984 Warner Bros. DVD: Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

involving LaDonna's missing brother strongly resembles this real-life story, though it shifts the focus to LaDonna's endurance in the face of a horrible fictional outcome that she determines to keep secret. This is psychologically poignant, but limits the dramatic impact of the storyline, at least during season 1. Creighton's wife Toni (Melissa Leo), a lawyer helping LaDonna find her brother, ends the season at a double dead end, and makes a similar choice to hide something awful. New Orleans truths that cannot be tolerated must be buried. Individual perseverance and DIY neighborhood community-building are two quasi-libertarian spells against darkness advocated by *Treme*, but they are ones that reveal a collapse of faith in any sort of larger-scale institution-building or the possibility of real structural change.

Along with Peters and Alexander, Pierce, who revealed in *When the Levees Broke* that he lost his childhood home in the storm, embodies a complex notion of the city's residents as grief-stricken and traumatized but unbowed. As though wishing to put a corrective lens on the post-Katrina view of New Orleans as battered beyond recognition, season 1 of *Treme* begins with a raucous "second line" street procession, filmed in a wonderfully confused riot of celebration by Agnieszka Holland, to which Batiste lends the swaggering oomph of his trombone riffs. It's like what Louis Armstrong once said of "my old home town" on an RCA recording of "High Society": "We're going give you an idea of one of those street parades down there!" *Treme* wants to do the same, conjuring up the traditional carnivalesque spirit of the place in a way that is both touching and fanciful. At such moments, it is as if the makers believe spellbinding New Orleans can be restored to its former glory and power.

Tulane Professor turned YouTube star Creighton Bernette (John Goodman) expatiates on what he calls "moments of artistic clarity and urban transcendence" that identify New Orleans as "a city that lives in the imagination of the world." Unusually strong bonds of community are often invoked by boosters and business interests when facts aren't the best way to lure visitors and retain residents, especially vis-à-vis a city that Ernest Callenbach in his winter 2006–07 *Film Quarterly* essay about *When the Levees Broke* calls "fantasmically mixed" and "the site of innumerable personal dooms." *Treme* isn't naive about these problems. This supposition of the city's magical effects on its residents is later complicated when Desautel decides to pack her bags ("this town beat me") and McAlary guides her through one last day in New Orleans. "Beautiful moments here," he says. "Just moments," she replies, "not a life." Creighton's soul-searching about the city's meaning leads him into darkness; Lambreaux is beaten by cops and spends Mardi Gras in jail after trying to squat in some Federal projects; LaDonna endures her horrific ordeal; Batiste resorts to playing in an airport welcoming band and fritters away his payout from a big gig on poker. Many of these characters' enterprises of renewal appear to be failing or leading to dead ends, but the show amalgamates their efforts into "a sense of shared purpose," as Creighton puts it. He later reverses himself with another notion—"New Orleans was a soap bubble"—which seems to acknowledge that the magic may have disappeared for good.

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During his interview for *When the Levees Broke*, Pierce identifies a New Orleans problem—"developers in bed with politicians"—that resonates far beyond the city limits. In *The Bad Lieutenant*, a parody of this problem involves a local gangster's dream of building luxury condos in a zone of waterfront warehouses. "It's like we're working for a greater good," muses Big Fate (Alvin "Xzibit" Joiner) to corrupt, pain-addled, and drug-deranged police Lieutenant Terence McDonagh (Nicolas Cage) as his hit men dump a body into a canal. Apart from such satire, Herzog is wholly unconcerned with the ethics of rebuilding the city, which he depicts as a depraved place. In the featurette that accompanies the DVD, Herzog says McDonagh experiences "the bliss of evil" on his murder case; the director sums up the atmosphere of New

THE BAD LIEUTENANT: TOXIC CITY

The Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call–New Orleans. © 2009 Lieutenant Productions Inc. DVD: First Look Studios.

Orleans as "an all-pervading climate of something not going right." Unconcerned with the traditions of the place—no sports fan would ever call LSU "Louisiana" as McDonagh refers to the college football team at one point—Herzog portrays a wasted city, alternating between the rougher streets of Algiers (whose murdered Senegalese immigrants may allude to the home country of many antebellum slaves) and a soulless, banal, and luxuriously corporate French Quarter scrubbed clean of urbanity, musical fizz, and lively human detritus. McDonagh himself resembles a tourist with a gun in his own city; at one point he gains access to an adjacent apartment during a high-stakes arrest, strolling past its inhabitants with his weapon drawn, and casually seizing a bag of marijuana for his own personal use ("I find it relaxes me," he muses to another murder suspect before lighting up a joint during the arrest).

The Bad Lieutenant is neo-noir camp. An idiosyncratic tone of death's-head humor prevails. Herzog calls William M. Finkelstein's script a "comedy" with "a strange laughter." Its set pieces of wicked drollery include an interrogation scene in which McDonagh cuts off the oxygen supply to a geriatric woman. *The Big Easy* (1986), with its madcap tone, comic violence, property-room jokes, and father–son duo of corrupt New Orleans police officers, perhaps influenced the tone of the film. Supposedly a remake (of a film Herzog notoriously claims he's never seen), the New Orleans *Bad Lieutenant* in fact teases its self-serious 1992 precursor: whereas Abel Ferrara's bad cop (Harvey Keitel) berates a drug-induced vision of Jesus as a "rat fuck" for abandoning humanity, McDonagh's cracked-out hallucinations of iguanas and the break-dancing soul of a murdered thug are played for laughs. And Herzog quietly subverts gender roles by depicting McDonagh as a bizarrely loving and dependent boyfriend to his prostitute partner Frankie (Eva Mendes), who out-earns him and buys his underwear.

Omitting references to street parades, music, or food, the city of carnival and community becomes in *The Bad Lieutenant* a gloomy, almost dystopian metropolis, more Gotham than Big Easy, more Paris Spleen than French Quarter. Like another precursor, the 1984 Clint Eastwood thriller *Tightrope*, about a single dad and homicide detective with a penchant for prostitutes, *The Bad Lieutenant* depicts the city as a zone of fear: highway slip roads, beat-down storefronts, shiny but empty tourist traps, backstreets, sewers, and canals. This is an environment for gangsters and junkies, not for jazz, dancing, and celebration. One location that appears twice in the film encapsulates the ambience. It's a parking lot across the street from a banal nightclub, the Gator's Retreat, where McDonagh lurks to rip off young white party people, pilfering drugs and extorting sex. Almost every major character is an exploiter, a gambler, or an addict, a prostitute or a john. Crack-induced hallucinations are as close to magic as you get here.

Herzog's longstanding vision of the New World as a place that produces or attracts madmen and dreamers, from *Stroszek* (1977) and *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) to *Little Dieter Needs to Fly* (1997) and *Grizzly Man* (2005), is recapitulated in Cage's scorched-earth performance as a man lost in a hopelessly broken place in which the rule of law is a joke and framing criminals is the only effective method of police work. Its wry cynicism is a strength, as is its abandonment of anxiety over whether the city can be saved. In fact, the film derives its force from mocking the idea that this place is hospitable on any level. Herzog's vision of a mechanistic circle of addiction and predation is encapsulated by footage of casino games shrieking "INSERT MORE COIN" and of an alligator lurking open-mouthed at the edge of a roadside accident.

In *The Bad Lieutenant*'s New Orleans, episodes of seeming magic are unmasked as the outcome of hallucinations, coincidences, conspiracies, or quick-fingered prestidigitation. A streak of good luck suddenly makes everything go right for McDonagh, at least on the surface. "You had a vision, didn't you?" asks fellow detective Armand Benoit (Shawn Hatosy) when McDonagh tells him to search a crime scene again, but in fact the DNA evidence found there has been planted. *Treme*'s core concerns—the admirable need to believe that something better is possible, the open question of whether decency can be restored to a shattered world, and the premise that miracles remain possible in New Orleans—get replayed when McDonagh's elated supervisor (Vondie Curtis-Hall) shows him the planted evidence that clinches their case. The boss's affirmation that all is well—"Yes!"—could be the kind of rallying cry that cheers the city's survivors in *Treme*, but in *The Bad Lieutenant*, it's portrayed as a form of wishful thinking.

J. M. TYREE, a *Film Quarterly* Writer-at-Large, wrote about *Mad Men* and *A Serious Man* in the summer 2010 issue.

ABSTRACT Whereas the David Simon–Eric Overmyer HBO series *Treme* emphasizes community and cultural vitality in post-Katrina New Orleans, Werner Herzog's *The Bad Lieutenant* wryly depicts the city as a corrupt dead zone.

KEYWORDS *Treme, The Bad Lieutenant,* David Simon, Werner Herzog, New Orleans

CREDITS *Treme*. Season one (ten episodes, April–June 2010). Network: HBO. Creators: David Simon, Eric Overmyer. Producer: Anthony Hemingway. Writers: David Simon, Eric Overmyer, David Mills, George Pelecanos, Lolis Elie, Tom Piazza, Davis Rogan. Directors: Agnieszka Holland, Jim McKay, Anthony Hemingway, Christine Moore, Brad Anderson, Simon Cellan-Jones, Ernest Dickerson, Dan Attias.

DVD DATA *The Bad Lieutenant: Port of Call—New Orleans*. Director: Werner Herzog. © 2009 Lieutenant Productions Inc. Publisher: First Look Studios. $28.98, 1 disc.

DESIRE AND TECHNOLOGY: AN INTERVIEW WITH ATOM EGOYAN

EMMA WILSON TALKS WITH THE DIRECTOR OF *CHLOE* AND *ADORATION* ABOUT ART AND INTIMACY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Atom Egoyan's new film *Chloe* (2009), with a script by Erin Cressida Wilson—who also wrote *Secretary* (2002) and *Fur* (2006)—is a reworking of Anne Fontaine's *Nathalie* (2003), in which a gynaecologist, suspecting her husband of infidelity, hires a prostitute to seduce him. Egoyan develops this scenario in order to explore motive, emotion, and desire in a characteristically complex fashion, building on his previous films' treatment of sexuality and, in particular, investigating the uneasy imbrication of desire and technology.

At the start of the film, we see escort Chloe (Amanda Seyfried), reflected in a murky antique mirror, putting on lace underwear. We hear her say in voiceover: "I guess I've always been pretty good with words." The eroticism of the scene is complicated by Chloe's self-consciousness as a storyteller as well as an object of fascination and desire. *Chloe* recalls Egoyan's *Exotica* (1994), which also concerns a young woman working in the sex industry. In both films, we are encouraged to think about these women's own emotions, desires, and needs—Chloe and *Exotica*'s Christina are presented as vulnerable, feeling subjects, not as mere "service people." Yet by showing other characters enraptured, seduced, and deluded by them, Egoyan in turn leads the viewer to question her or his ability to fathom the characters' motives and behavior.

Egoyan's films have always dissolved divisions between queer and straight, showing characters discovering unexpected possibilities in erotic situations. Chloe seems to find real fulfilment with the gynaecologist Catherine (Julianne Moore), after their contractual, businesslike arrangement develops into something else. After they make love, Chloe appears in Catherine's office with a bouquet of white calla lilies. In response to Catherine's attempts to contain and curtail the relationship with another pay-off, Chloe says, with tears in her eyes, alive and delicate like the flowers she is holding, "I touched you." She adds: "This is so, so real."

Steenbeckett (London)
Atom Egoyan, 2002. Commissioned and produced by Artangel.

Discussing Egoyan's early films, Carol Desbarats has observed that they "show a world where two traditionally incompatible spheres are joined: the private intimacies of family life and sexuality, and the public access allowed by modern media technologies."[1] Egoyan includes video diaries and taped therapy sessions in *Next of Kin* (1984), home videos and amateur porn in *Family Viewing* (1987), and a video mausoleum, obsessive reviewing of prerecorded videos, and erotic teleconferencing in *Speaking Parts* (1989). In a video interview with the director, Paul Virilio has suggested that Egoyan's early films contain "video installations" set up within the films themselves.[2] In recent years, Egoyan has turned his attention to digital technology, which features both in his cinema work and also in a number of museum, gallery, or site-specific installations. *Chloe*, *Adoration* (2006), and these other works explore digital media and the forms of contact, communication, and narrative connection they enable. Egoyan seems especially sensitive to the aspect of loss which accompanies such communications—the nostalgia and longing they generate for more traditional modes of contact.

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Amanda Seyfried, Julianne Moore, Atom Egoyan
Chloe. Photo: Rafy. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

Chloe says that she hates the Internet because it mediates relationships. She gives a CD to Catherine's son Michael (Max Thieriot), who has already downloaded all the music on it, telling him that he doesn't have a solid, tactile object, the encased CD that he can hold in his hands. Her words are plaintive and resonant in a film that associates interaction with paranoia and surveillance. In a scene similar to one in *Up in the Air* (2009), Michael is dumped by his girlfriend during a webcam chat. Obsessively suspicious, Catherine spies on her music professor husband, David (Liam Neason), through the glass panels of their architect-designed house as he communicates with his students via instant messenger. She reads his text messages and listens in on Michael's cellphone calls to him. Meanwhile Chloe looks through the photo archive of Michael's Facebook page, searching for images of Catherine.

Adoration too has an ambivalent relation to digital technology in its investigation of fantasized family histories and imagined terrorist acts. Schoolboy Simon (Devon Bostick), encouraged by his teacher Sabine (Arsinée Khanjian), researches a man who planted a bomb in the luggage carried by his pregnant wife on a trip to the Mideast. Simon's own parents have died in a car crash. His grandfather maintains that Simon's father was responsible and a monster. Rejecting this history in a fictitious monologue delivered in Sabine's class, Simon identifies himself as the child of the failed terrorist. Unknown to Simon, Sabine has her own reasons for taking an interest in his fantasies of paternity. She was the first wife of Simon's father, Sammy, and seeks a connection, however illusory, to Simon so she has an excuse to visit his house. Simon in turn pursues his fantasy in Internet chatrooms, during a series of streaming media exchanges which allow the film to ask questions about testimony and the privilege of victim narratives in interactive Internet culture. *Adoration* thus reflects on the intersection of private narratives and public history, something that has been of keen interest to Egoyan as part of his treatment of the Armenian genocide and diasporic identity in *Calendar* (1993), *Ararat* (2002), and the short film *A Portrait of Arshile* (1995). This concern is also evident in the installations *America, America* (1997), *Early Development* (1997), *Diaspora* (with music by Philip Glass, 2001), and *Auroras* (2007).

In his 2008 Toronto installation, *Adoration Street*, Egoyan recreated the suburban street where Simon lives with his uncle. The windows of each house framed webcam talking heads whose words were amplified through speakers. The in-

Adoration Street (Toronto)
Courtesy of Phillip Barker.

stallation recalls the sense of hypermediation and collage conveyed by the series of webcam conversations in *Adoration* itself, but since these Internet images are now weirdly dislocated by appearing in domestic windows, they take on a ludicrous, manic quality. The effect is heightened by the voices engaged in trivial, self-authenticating, even rather mad testimonies that merge into one another as the viewer walks down the street.

Egoyan also dealt with media and technology in perhaps his most ambitious installation, *Steenbeckett* (2002), mounted at the closed-down London Museum of Mankind, which incorporated and developed his television adaptation of *Krapp's Last Tape* (2000) starring John Hurt. As Jonathan Romney describes it: "The film's final shot is projected digitally on the wall of a narrow corridor; but the viewer is obliged to sit too near the wall to see an undistorted image, the picture itself presenting a mass of shifting pixels. In the larger adjoining room, the same shot on celluloid is run through a Steenbeck at the far end of the room. We can hear Hurt's voice and just about make out the images on the machine's small screen, while the film itself—all 2,000 feet of it—runs in a single continuous loop around the room, zig-zagging through a system of pulleys between floor and ceiling, passing through the Steenbeck before shuttling around on its next circuit."[3] At the moment in cinema history when the Steenbeck editing machine has become obsolete, Egoyan conjures its nostalgic allure in a further engagement with Beckett's play, which is itself about the pathos and inanity of attempts to use technology to archive lived experience.

When I met Egoyan at his Toronto office, March 30, 2010, one of the first objects he showed me was a Steenbeck similar to the one that was used in the London installation. We watched fragments of *Krapp's Last Tape* on celluloid run through the mechanism, and I noticed familiar props around us: the neon sign from *Exotica*, the haircomb from *Chloe*. (Many more props, documents, early scripts, and creative diaries are available in the extraordinary Atom Egoyan archive at the Toronto International Film Festival Reference Library.) The interview took place in a room in whose walls are decorated with collages of images and documents. I looked at a letter from Michael Haneke asking Egoyan about the video images in *Family Viewing*. Egoyan turned the pages of the creative notebook he used for *Chloe*. He read me passages from *Dear Sandra*, an exquisite 2007 artbook for Volumina that responds to Visconti's *Sandra of a Thousand Delights* (1965) and provides inspiration for one of the sets in *Chloe*. It

was an intimate experience to be in proximity to these material objects, which were a salient presence while we discussed their digital counterparts and replacements.[4]

Emma Wilson: In the ways *Chloe* develops the material of *Nathalie*, one of the major additions is the investigation of digital.

Atom Egoyan: It was really just a question of locating it seven years after the original. If anyone is having an affair, the cell phone is the way to go. You can have a conversation with someone and be present physically at a dinner and be furiously texting with someone else at the same time. That idea of having a parallel conversation quite effortlessly is just part of our reality and it wasn't seven years ago.

In *Chloe* we read mobile phone messages, view Michael's online break-up, see a digital photograph Chloe sends Catherine.

That particular scene with the break-up was fascinating to me. This is a house which is constructed of a number of different levels. Catherine is able to look at her husband and son as though they were in an aquarium. In one scene she's spying on her son is a more classic way, furtively through an open doorway, and is caught by the girlfriend in an instant transmission she's seeing. That was different from the original script where it was just a phone conversation, but it seemed too delicious an opportunity to pass up.

The glass house relates to themes of surveillance and control in the film.

From the moment I read the first draft, there was a motif of glass and it seemed to speak quite specifically to these two women. Catherine was a character who was looking through glass. Chloe was using glass as a mirror, as a reflective surface. When we first see Chloe it's through a mirror. When she first meets Catherine, there's a physical meeting in the washroom through a mirror. And so glass is woven through the film. Even seeing lipstick on glass or seeing these traces on glass, either physical traces or reflective traces.

Catherine is someone who likes to live in controlled environments. Part of her crisis is that there are things slipping out of her control and she's trying to deal with that and it's put her in a sort of state of panic. I don't know whether she'd be able to articulate why she hired a prostitute as opposed to a detective. It has to do with a notion of having a direct transmission of what the erotic life of her husband is, independent of her presence, and being able to hear that story. The last thing she would have expected is that that would be stimulating to her, but it is, and so it goes further and further. The glass is a way of her asserting control over a situation in which she feels a degree of powerlessness. The glass house gives these remarkable views onto her family, and onto the ravine and its sense of the primal force of nature. This is suddenly turned against her and encroached upon. Chloe is suddenly able to gain access to her life.

Catherine wants to orchestrate her husband's infidelity but the situation goes out of her control.

You might think of the inspection booth in *Exotica*. That was designed for one purpose, but suddenly a generational shift transforms it into something else. Although it was set up as an observation booth for a voyeur, one of Zoe's mother's clients, in Zoe's reign at the club it becomes something entirely different. It becomes a place she can use as an observation post for security purposes. These things that we build are clearly infused with the personality of the people who control them and that can change. Any museum or archive is really built on the aspirations of the people who govern it.

Another departure from *Nathalie* is to show as live action scenes that are later proved to be fantasy. It is sometimes uncertain who is the subject of those fantasies.

Chloe is speaking of things that happened to her in these spaces, not necessarily with Catherine's husband. She is able to revisit these spaces in which she had an experience, where she was left feeling quite empty, and then infuse it with power through the retelling. She's evoking that, while Catherine is clearly observing from her own experiences of what those places might be. The film is based on the competing fantasies of these two women. The fantasies they have of each other are not really defined by anything other than the particular task that Catherine has given to Chloe. What Chloe then does with that, and how it begins to excite an aspect of her own imagination, is beyond Catherine's grasp. Catherine is so consumed with her own sorrow that she's not able in any way to understand the effect that this storytelling is having on this young woman. Chloe's never met anyone like her and she's suddenly able to tell her story in a way that gives it a sense of magnitude and worth. Such transferences are endlessly fascinating to me.

Chloe seems to reject digital technology.

She actually uses it, because the only reason she knew that Michael was playing a hockey game was because of the information on Facebook. By scrolling through photographs on the Facebook archive looking for an image of Catherine, Chloe somewhat recalls Lisa in *Speaking Parts*. We can only imagine that moment of finding the image was extraordinarily exciting for Chloe. That goes right back to those early films, like *Speaking Parts*, with characters trying to search for meaning through a technological maze that they either set up themselves or that is imposed upon them. At that time in the mid-1980s I was obsessed with the idea of *amour de loin* where the object you behold is never really in your physical presence. Lisa is setting up layers with the candles and the video screens that somehow replicate for her the feelings she gets when she yearns for Lance, someone who

CHLOE: DANGEROUS ROMANCE

Photos: Rafy. Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics.

has no presence for her. She has no purchase on him in real life but she has the fantasy world where she is able to replicate both frustration and that sense of emotional acquisition. I wasn't thinking of this when I was constructing that moment with Chloe, but that's in fact what she too has done in that brief exchange.

Do you see continuity in personal and sexual investment in technology pre- and post-digital?

The main difference is, I suppose, that in the 1980s, with the closed-circuit system that was used in *Speaking Parts*, it was rarefied and it was time-based. There were certain sites where such activity could be exchanged. It wasn't casual. By its very nature it had to become ritualized. You had to book a time. You had to go to a place where the technology existed. It's a paradox that the actual visual texture is exactly the same, looking at monitors. One can make the mistake of thinking that the issues that are being raised are consistent, but they're not. In the 1980s and early 90s I was concerned with the issue of whether these technologies were filtering emotion or distancing us from each other. We've seen now over a decade into this new century that digital technologies saturate us with a degree of intimacy we could never have expected. We're still negotiating screens, but these screens are now infinitely transportable. The access and contact we have with each other is spontaneous.

This is witnessed in the digital image that Chloe sends Catherine after they have slept together. Is Chloe starting to blackmail Catherine?

I think the violation is really that she was asleep, that ultimately she was so vulnerable with this person. It's about trust, right? I think the fact is Chloe took the image and is transmitting it out of love. It's not really about threatening her at all.

I'm interested in the physical return of the haircomb at the end. Does Catherine need to hold on to some part of Chloe to save her marriage?

It's something that's either done fondly or very clinically and both interpretations are entirely valid. She's wistfully remembering Chloe or it's just a prop.

Material objects and digital images return in *Adoration*.

Simon has never believed the narrative that his father is a monster and in order to exorcise that he has to make him the most extreme monster. He stumbles across this story in which he is allowed to test out this fantasy. The technology accelerates the process in a way that would otherwise be unimaginable. It releases different energies that become part of his manic journey. He finds communities that could never have existed in the physical world. There is no way there would be a community of people mourning an accident that didn't happen because by the time people got in cars and started driving to the clubhouse they would realize it was absurd. The technology available allows these fringe elements suddenly to find expression. There's a momentum that can be built up. That's what the film is really exploring. What's curious is that when this reaches a certain peak, Simon still has to make a physical journey. That's perhaps something I'm imposing on this young man because of how I felt when I was a young man. He goes back to these original documents, his grandmother's drawings and his father's designs. These are plans for physical projects that still persist in his life but without the same meaning because they are robbed of the guardian of their value. Everything has been corrupted and I think we're seeing in this film the play between physical and digital corruption.

At this moment our sense of reality is being reconfigured in an amoeba-like way, in an ongoing process. A design, and the attendant object that it inspires, is fixed, while digital information, especially as it evolves through the net, is constantly shifting. That's the whole idea of a Web 2.0 technology where there's a collective sense of what constitutes reality, which is constantly shifting depending on what people's particular needs might be. Simon has thrown himself into this provocative space where his own past is based on the interpretation of a number of friends and strangers. He's suddenly vulnerable to this overwhelming need to interpret in a collective way. He feels so confused by that, he reverts to this almost naively physical journey in an attempt to reclaim something that he's experiencing as opposed to being an increasingly subdued witness to his own history as it is interpreted by others.

Both Simon and Sabine are involved in processes of mourning.

The whole film is in some ways governed by Sabine's desire to get into the house, a house in which she watched another life with her beloved unfold and that she wants now to enter as a way of her exorcising once and for all what this person meant in her life. So the entire game which she plays in order to provoke Simon and to gain access to the house, all these agendas of multiculturalism and tolerance, testing these issues, are really just a pretense.

Adoration and *Chloe* are about women trying to access a space that isn't theirs. In the case of *Chloe*, by the end of the film, we understand why she wants access to the house. In the case of *Adoration* it's completely oblique, there's no way a viewer could understand what Sabine's motivations are on a first viewing. Simon knows that there's some other agenda that she has, but can never understand what that might be. There's the idea that both of them feel something else is going on, but like the viewer, they are not able to locate themselves. This is tremendously frustrating for some viewers, but is at the core of how a film like that is constructed. I don't know whether we live in a culture where there's time to

do that anymore. It's a very utopian view of what the cinematic experience is about.

There are immediate pleasures in your films as well. The opening shot of the mother in *Adoration* bathes the viewer in the sensuality of the music and the setting.

Adoration is a chamber piece. Work is done with Mychael [Danna] to allow space for the viewer to listen and to make no attempt to make the music invisible and to make it part of the construction of the piece.

The musical construction of *Adoration* contrasts with the use of improvised dialogue and proliferating images in the chatroom sequences.

One of the textual problems with *Adoration* is that a lot of the noise is meant to be noise. Because my films are so carefully written, I thought that the introduction of the improvised dialogue would tonally allow the viewer to see it as an aural wash. That's not the case and it has become even more accentuated in some of the dubbed versions. My only regret is it wasn't made more abstract.

We used a lot of the chatroom material in an installation called *Adoration Street*, which was presented here in Toronto. I was frustrated with the idea of the film alone. I had a sense there was material that bore further investigation. Much like *Steenbeckett* or *Evidence* [an installation using video footage from *Felicia's Journey* (1999)].

This sense of further investigation, the afterlife of the films, is fascinating.

This has been the case with the images from *A Portrait of Arshile* [close-up images of Egoyan's son as a small child]. There was a shot I could only have done with the video camera because it allowed me a proximity to Arshile's face. In the installation *Early Development* for Le Fresnoy I put it onto 35mm film strip and set it up as a loop. A 35mm projector is projecting the image and the loop is criss-crossing back and forth over the face, the digital image of the face. It's a direct conflict between the digital and film process. The title *Early Development* itself of course refers to development of the child and also film development. Film development involves the idea of a chemical bath and film running through reels. There is a play between the reprocessed video image and this archaic film process.

***A Portrait of Arshile* also explores questions in relation to the Armenian genocide and the diaspora. Is there any link between this unfinished history and your ongoing work?**

In *Ararat*, what excites Raffi's imagination is a response to the cumbersome and unsatisfying construction of history that he sees on this set. There are all sorts of compromises and strategies being deployed that he finds inadequate because of his own personal sensibility, his inability to reconcile his feeling with the imposed narrative. These are issues he may not be able to articulate, but which he feels very deeply

Top: *A Portrait of Arshile*. © 1995 BBC/Arts Council of England. DVD: included on Miramax Home Entertainment/ Buena Vista Home Entertainment edition of *Ararat*. Middle and bottom: *Speaking Parts*. © 1989 Speaking Parts Ltd. DVD: Zeitgeist Films.

Adoration. © 2008 Adoration Productions Inc. DVD: Sony Pictures Classics.

and which set off his quest. It's curious that this quest takes him to a place where he's left with the idea of creating film plates, which will then digitally be enhanced in order to articulate his feeling. He doesn't want this issue to be resolved in a work that is as vulnerable to interpretation as a movie. He wants it to be fixed and yet in order to do that he has unleashed a process which is in itself ongoing and never-ending. Within the film, either in [*Ararat*'s fictional Armenian director] Edward's film or in the film I've created, we see a march which is a digital construction. There's a pan across an open field where we see a crowd of people marching but they're all digitally inserted. It's a product either of Raffi's imagination or of Edward's own movie. We're not quite sure which because at the end of the film all these systems are confused. Much like—and I hadn't thought of it this way—the process that Simon [in *Adoration*] subjects himself to. The possibilities of digital media in some way reflect the excitement of the creative act because they are unfixed and constantly evolving and they are highly sensitive to interpretation. The danger is that the interpretation is not coming from a singular artistic source, but from other sources of enhancement or corruption depending on how trusting or vigilant one is.

Subjective and objective, analogue and digital, are so intricately involved.

There's that moment where, just as in an installation, you have Raffi's digital camera on top of these canisters of film which, depending on what these two men choose to believe, are either drugs or unprocessed film. All it takes is for this one person to believe his story, and there's a transformation of some sort. That was very touching to me. The sense that history is not the result of grandiose gestures and constructions or propagandistic machines, but rather conversations that are held between individuals and the agendas that each of those people set.

***Adoration* was shot on 35mm. How do you view 35mm?**

It's supremely impractical. There's no question about that. I do think there's something unique about the grain structure when you see an image directly off a negative. It's unworldly. It's so pristine and so arresting. It's lovely, but you can't justify it. There are horrors—seeing a scratched print, bad reel changes, dirt, and confusions about the very order in which a reel is to be presented. There's something endearing about that because it speaks to our own bodies and things that we can relate to in terms of things being scratched or damaged or confused. Digital gives clarity, but there's something we are missing. 35mm is, sensually, the best experience of watching the projected image. I consider myself so fortunate that some of my films, especially my anamorphic films, cinemascope films like *The Adjuster* [1991] and *Felicia's Journey* [1999] and *Where the Truth Lies* [2005] are available as prints

made from original negative. It's a wonderful way to experience those movies. Recently there was a restored version of *The Adjuster* and it was just such a delight to see the grain structure.

I think 35mm will continue to exist as an archival form. Archivally it is the most assured way of keeping those materials since we don't know yet what will happen to digital work.

How has the editing process changed?

When I used to edit a scene, to try another approach I would have to reconstitute that scene that was broken down. It meant tearing apart splices and putting the film back together again. I could see where the previous cut was made and there would be some physical sense that something had gone before. That definitely changes the way you make decisions. Now when you're looking at a new version, immediately it's given to you in a pristine condition. You have a sense of malleability that is quite shocking. I don't know if it inspires the same choices that were made in a film like *Exotica*.

The scene I most remember editing in *Exotica*—because it was as a real breakthrough—was the scene where Christina and [her former lover and the club MC] Eric meet each other in the hallway. It starts with him flicking on and off a switch in his room and we start hearing his voiceover of his memory of this walk. Those shots seem to collide into each other. I remember a very fervent night editing that and making those almost sculptural choices. Then in the morning Susan [Shipton, the film's editor] came in and saw the mess that I'd been making. But still we understood that we had solved the question. I'm not sure that it would have been solved the same way through digital editing. Perhaps. It certainly would have been less messy and would have required less concentrated consideration. I don't know. You can talk about that, but there's no return.

In your short film *Artaud Double Bill* [2007], a young woman watching *Vivre sa vie* [1962] records the inserted images from *The Passion of Joan of Arc* [1928] on her cell phone and sends them to a friend watching *The Adjuster* in another auditorium.

A term that's used in digital technology is "random access." It allows us to chart our own way through a work, while cinema presupposes that there is a fixed projection that will persist. Whether or not the audience leaves the room, the film will continue to unspool. In *Artaud Double Bill*, the young woman's random access to this masterwork by Dreyer is the result of someone's spontaneous decision to tape it off the screen and transmit it. This mythological close-up of Renée Falconetti can be seen on a screen that is only a couple of inches wide. Dreyer's original concept is profoundly corrupted. That process of corruption may have started with Godard's decision to refilm Dreyer in the scene where Anna Karina goes into the cinema. We end with this question which I can't even begin to answer: is it better not to experience the film at all or to experience such a grotesque reinterpretation and reformatting?

Characters in your films invest in technology to find an outlet for desires. If technology weren't available, the desires would still be pursued.

I agree with you. When I made *Exotica* I was so exhausted by the idea of image systems, I thought let's try and make a film where that's not even presented. Those systems are not just the result of technologies, they are also the result of how we place ourselves physically. In that film it ends up being about theatricality. It's the same issues. You find an outlet. It initiates a process where the rules shift around you and I don't think it's any safer or any more controllable in a physical environment ultimately than in a digital or a technical one. Ultimately these issues persist and there's a feeling that you are trying to resolve issues in your life through the placement of others either in a physical sense or in a virtual sense. There are dangers involved with that.

Will this thread about digital communication continue in your filmmaking?

I've written a new script and it's certainly included. You looked at a letter from Haneke. I think *Caché* is a brilliant work that suggests there is really no separation of image and reality anymore. It goes back to the argument between Baudrillard and Virilio where one is talking about the image as simulacrum and the other is saying that the image is reality. At that point my work was being interpreted within that argument between these two great thinkers. Now perhaps we are at a place where that's become a non-issue. It's a strange passage we've made in a few short years.

1. Carol Desbarats, "Conquering What They Tell Us Is 'Natural'," in Carol Desbarats et al (eds), *Atom Egoyan*, trans. Brian Holmes (Paris: Editions Dis Voir, 1993), 9.
2. Paul Virilio and Atom Egoyan, "Video Letters," ibid., 105.
3. Jonathan Romney, *Atom Egoyan* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), 165.
4. I am grateful to Hannah Mowat for an email exchange about digital in Egoyan and to Isabelle McNeill for conversations about C*hloe* in Toronto.

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ABSTRACT Armenian Canadian director Atom Egoyan's recent films, *Adoration* (2006) and *Chloe* (2009), and his art installations, pursue and complicate his career-long interest in technology and its intersections with desire and fantasy. In an interview with Emma Wilson, Egoyan discusses these works and reflects more broadly on filmmaking in the digital age.

KEYWORDS Atom Egoyan, *Chloe*, *Adoration*, digital, memory

CREDITS *Chloe*. Director: Atom Egoyan. Producers: Jeffrey Clifford, Joe Medjuck, Ivan Reitman, Simone Urdl, Jennifer Weiss. Writers: Erin Cressida Wilson, Anne Fontaine. Cinematographer: Paul Sarossy. Editor: Susan Shipton. Music: Mychael Danna. U.S. distributor: Sony Pictures Classics.

SAD TIMES: AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIA SULEIMAN

ROB WHITE DISCUSSES AESTHETICS AND POLITICS WITH THE DIRECTOR OF *THE TIME THAT REMAINS*

Palestinian director Elia Suleiman's films blend fictionalized memoir, burlesque, formal experimentation, and pungent reflection on Mideast politics. A memorable sequence in *Divine Intervention: A Chronicle of Love and Pain* (2002) exemplifies the hybrid aesthetic. Near the end of the film, the character of ES (played by Suleiman himself) visits his sick father in hospital and then sits pensively in his car at a ramshackle Israeli checkpoint. These sad, quotidian scenes are followed by something drastically different. We cut to a desert plateau where Israeli soldiers perform a target-practice dance routine in the style of a Bollywood action film. Then a ninja clad in black leather appears from nowhere to wreak wire-fighting havoc; she hovers in mid-air and uses her keffiyeh to lassoo the commander's machine gun. After this delirious interval, we return abruptly to ES, who is chopping onions in his dimly lit kitchen. A close-up shows his meager tears. Achieving a powerful effect of juxtaposition, Suleiman switches between mundanity and fantasy, introspection and exuberance, vignettes of personal distress and political cartoon. (Suleiman's first feature, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* [1997] is divided into two parts: "Nazareth: Personal Diary" and "Jerusalem: Political Diary," reflecting a similar interchange.)

Whereas the two previous films are set in the more-or-less-real present, Suleiman's latest, *The Time That Remains: Chronicle of a Present Absentee*, has a historical span. The four main sections of this superb film are chronologically ordered. 1948: Nazareth surrenders to the Israeli army and is annexed. Fuad, ES's father, repairs guns—an act for which he is denounced and, after a mock execution, beaten senseless by Israeli soldiers. 1970: among other sketches of family life, this long section includes a series of comic scenes in which Fuad tolerantly intervenes to prevent a drunken neighbor hurting himself. Meanwhile, ten-year-old ES is berated for talking about American imperialism in class. 1980: Fuad has heart trouble. Now it is ES who is denounced; he leaves the country to avoid arrest. The present: ES returns to care for his dying mother. He visits Ramallah and in a fantasy sequence pole-vaults the security wall.

Both *Chronicle of a Disappearance* and *Divine Intervention* use text being written by ES—notable are the neat rows of sticky-note scene headings we see on his apartment walls in the latter film—as punctuating intertitles ("The day after," "Father falls sick"). *The Time That Remains* dispenses with verbal signposting in favor of other narrative devices. We hear the mother's letters being read out as introductions to the 1970 and 1980 sections. There is also a frame story. The film opens with ES getting into a taxi on a stormy night. He and the driver travel into an eerie no-place. The driver is alarmed: "Where are the kibbutzes? Did the earth swallow them up?" This episode resumes just before the coda to *The Time That Remains* and reminds viewers that this historical narrative is still a self-reflexive fiction even though it lacks some of the experimentalism of its predecessors.

ES is a complex character. In *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, he is at his most multifaceted. In one sequence in a darkened room he sits in a deskchair that is upholstered with the Palestinian flag before getting up to peer at a manikin: here he is alert, curious. Grim humor verges on slapstick later when armed police appear outside his window and then burst in. They rush around inside without seeming to notice the unperturbed ES. Shortly afterward, ES's face contorts childishly as he eats spaghetti in close-up. This is straightforward physical comedy. More subtle is an earlier scene, in which he is due to give a lecture—"I'd like to introduce film director Elia Suleiman," says the host, "back from his voluntary exile in New York." When ES gets ready to speak the screech of microphone feedback and the sound of audience cell-phone chatter stop him before he can even begin. We never hear his words and ES's silence is the most consistent character trait.

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Elia Suleiman as ES
The Time That Remains. Courtesy of New Wave Films.

In *Divine Intervention*, ES manages to be an accidental action hero for a few moments. He eats an apricot while driving and then tosses the pit out of the window. The stone explodes like a bomb, destroying a tank at the roadside. But elsewhere in the film ES is, more typically, inert and inexpressive. He waits and watches; more than anything else, ES is a witness.

The comedy drains away almost altogether and the mood of melancholy intensifies in *The Time That Remains*. In the final section, ES enters a deserted restaurant. Suddenly he is grabbed from behind and we see an exchange of slaps with another man. Then they embrace: for this is an old friend (Jamal Daher, who sits next to ES outside The Holyland gift shop in *Chronicle of a Disappearance*). The brief burst of ambivalent pantomime underlines how nonconfrontational ES is here, even by the standard of the previous films. The play-fighting and slow-motion pole-vaulting in *The Time That Remains* are significantly less combative acts than the tank incineration.

What should we make of ES's restraint? Interviewed about *Divine Intervention* in September 2002, Suleiman referred to the Palestinian predicament in terms of "the paralysis that comes from the conscious or unconscious acknowledgment that the dominant force that rules over you can't be shaken" (*Journal of Palestine Studies*, winter 2003, 70). Reticent and often frozen, ES nevertheless gives expression to an experience of powerlessness. And if he personifies detachment or even resignation, that does not mean that hope has been lost. After all, here is Elia Suleiman himself acting onscreen, assertively present in his own fiction. The characterization of ES and Suleiman's performance of the role—which is the author's public act of testimony, reflection, protest—thus constitutes an intervention and not a retreat.

Still, there is no getting away from the pathos that suffuses *The Time That Remains*. It is a more tonally even and harmonious film than either *Chronicle of a Disappearance* or *Divine Intervention* but its harmony is very much in a minor key. Starting with the title's intimations of mortality, *The Time That Remains* sustains a mood of poignancy at the expense of much of the playfulness of the earlier features. Some scenes achieve tremendous intensity, particularly the mock execution of Fuad. He is one among a whole group of

blindfolded prisoners (most of them forced onto their knees in the quiet old orchard) whom Suleiman films in piercing wide shots that accentuate their plight. Much later there is a remarkable series of images framed by a window of ES's mother sitting on her balcony. It is a sad and vivid portraiture that epitomizes Suleiman's great artistry.

I met Suleiman at a famous London hotel on May 26, 2010, having heard him take part in a Q&A about *The Time That Remains* at Tate Modern two days previously. I was especially interested in asking him whether he acknowledged the tonal and stylistic consolidation I detected. (For further background, see another *Journal of Palestine Studies* interview, winter 2000; an excellent article by Gary Indiana in the January/February 2003 issue of *Film Comment*; and a penetrating analysis by Bresheeth Haim, "A Symphony of Absence: Borders and Liminality in Elia Suleiman's *Chronicle of a Disappearance*," *Framework*, winter 2002. My thanks to Lalitha Gopalan for discussion of Suleiman's work.)

Rob White: *The Time That Remains* is dedicated to the memory of your parents, and based on your family archive, including your mother's letters, which are read out during the film. Can you say something about this process of research and its incorporation into the film?

Elia Suleiman: when you say "research" or when you say "archives," the images that come to my mind are a lot less precise than this. The first script I tried to make, a version of which would become *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, was very interwoven, in the manner of Hou Hsaio-hsien. He was one of the people who convinced me that it's possible to make the films I was thinking of making. It started with Ozu, in fact. The first time I watched an Ozu film (during a New York retrospective), suddenly it occurred to me that people in Japan are actually like Arabs in Nazareth, or vice versa. Then I saw that the man whom I was always fascinated by, who is sitting idly in a garden, watching people passing by with a certain alienation, is someone filmable. But I didn't know this was cinematic until I got the signature, the approval of, Ozu. Then comes Hou Hsaio-hsien, who followed on from Ozu; then I felt I could be at home with filmmaking.

So when I had never made a film, I wrote a script which I thought was going to be my first feature film (this was before I had even made a short film), and it had letters that my mother was sending to me when I was in New York and in London, where I lived for seven months when I was very young. That script was my first incorporation. I had put the letters in a box and I knew that one day I would use them for a film. But then I never made that film and finally they popped up again, but differently, and different pieces of the letters, in *The Time That Remains*. But some of the words are from letters she wrote to relatives in Amman and others from letters she sent me from her visit to Amman. (It impressed her: big houses, clean roads, an Arab city which had developed without her knowledge.) So there's a lack of precision about this thing you call "archive" and it would put me in a much more serious position to have to defend than to say simply that if it rings true, that's what is important, if the letters in the film carry in them what could be the potential truth—that's what concerns me. The fact is of course that we never document any memory, we never reproduce it, and especially when we make films. I would say that initially what we very much want to do is deviate from reality and metamorphose that reality somewhere else. So it's important to be significantly precise about the lack of precision in whatever I do in my films.

As for my father: when I made *Divine Intervention*, he had already passed away, but before—maybe ten or twelve years ago—when he started to get very sick (he had cancer), he had already told me many interesting stories. He was a great storyteller, he had great punchlines. One day I asked him to start to write because I wanted him also to forget. And at the same time I was thinking I would need more than just my memory if I was ever to do any of this. I have to say that the pieces that fascinated me from his storytelling, and were fascinating as potential narratives for film, were not necessarily the ones that I got to be fascinated with when I became mature enough to look at them cinematically.

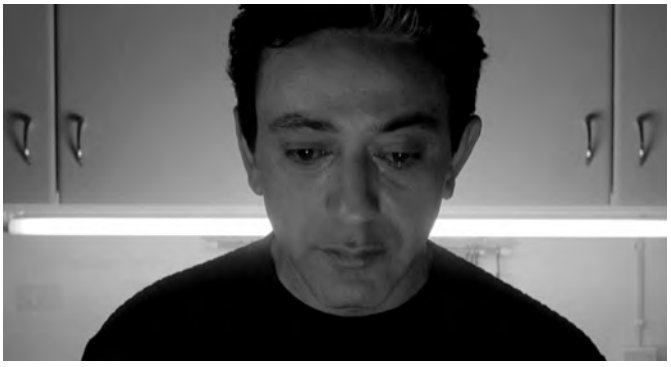
Can you say more about Ozu's influence?

It's very difficult to answer such questions. I can tell you only a certain vague memory of seeing Ozu and thinking, "this is who I am," but in fact every time I tried to imitate him—and I shot a few scenes which are terribly Ozu-ish—it ended up in the garbage. Every time I tried to imitate him, I failed. Was he an inspiration or not? I'm sure he was, but now I can't even determine that. I watched also a lot of other filmmakers. But my fascination when I went to an Ozu film was total helplessness. I had no muscles but to surrender to his images. I melted in the face of Ozu, almost like he was my discoverer. When I saw Ozu, I thought: "if that's what it is, then I can make films." I was more uptight (in a good way) and on my toes when I was watching a Bresson movie. There was also Wenders, Antonioni, but Ozu was the closest in terms of the frame. When I frame I am obsessive, I am truly obsessive. To the point of delaying a shot so the assistant director goes crazy. There's only one place in the world that I think the camera can be put for a certain shot, and this is a total hallucinatory position on my part. Then the cinematographer tells me: "Elia, this is it, trust me, there is no other place."

I would say that this new film has more coherent, integrated storytelling—less fragmented, less experimental. Do you agree?

There are two ways to answer this. One is to say "no." Full stop. Another is to say, "I don't know because I haven't made another film so I have no way to know." And a third

DIVINE INTERVENTION



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answer is a lot more complex—if I look critically, from a distance, at my work and how it progressed. Of course when I made my short film, *Homage by Assassination* [1992], you can find a lot of conceptual things in it. It is infested with references, Godardian to Anonionesque! Of course I did not have my own language intact. I had a sense of it, but whenever there was a lack of a poetic image, the concept always came in very handy—intellectual stutters et cetera. I say "Godardian," in fact I mean "conceptual." (I don't pray to Godard every day! But he is such a genius, encompassing a lot of what can be done conceptually in film, and poetically of course.) But then slowly, slowly as I gained more secure ground in terms of my own self-expression, I started to abandon a lot of the inside-out filmmaking, throwing myself further and further into more risky ground; more and more into the emotional and into the poetic. I'm not attacking myself here. There are two faces to this: insecurity and maturity. The script notes in *Divine Intervention* were not at all out of lack of other alternatives.

Since I make personal films, this is part of my life, truly, my everyday life. If you come to my Paris apartment now, there are scene headings awaiting me for the next film. Let me tell you something about *Divine Intervention*. When I was writing the script, there was a more narrative script and in that narrative the father in this family gets sick and passes away. And of course it's semi-biographical, but my father was not sick then. And it was traumatic for me when I then learned that he was sick and I had written it that way. So I abandoned the script. I felt guilty. I left Paris and went back and took care of my father. I stayed a long time in Nazareth. And in the film you see the slips on the wall again. That's why in the film it says, "Father falls sick." This is exactly what happened. I wrote him sick on the wall and he got sick. So I was faithful eventually to that moment. You are probably the first person ever to hear this story. It always skipped me to tell people, I don't know why. This yellow slip was a very dramatic thing for me because of this prediction that my father was getting sick. So here we have different facets of the conceptual, not-the-conceptual, and where it comes from insecurity, and where it becomes secure.

At the Tate you described your appearances in your films as "striptease." One must not overlook the complexity of the personal element of your films and also the fictionality. Of course one cannot avoid the recognition that you are there, and your parents are there, and your relationship to your parents is there. Yet ES is also a mysterious, silent, inaccessible figure; the personal is also impersonal perhaps. In any case, it's not simply confessional. So in what way is *The Time That Remains* a personal film?

"Stripteasing" is also an emotion that you are giving, showing, expressing, that you want to share with a spectator. This character and this filmmaking are always on a borderline, even in what we call fiction. I am there *slightly more* than in a fiction. You are on a very thin rope here between what is fiction and what is not. In a way my presence is hyperreal (I'm not so sure, by the way, what is the antithesis of fiction) and in a way I am almost close to being myself. It goes to both extremes. It's on the edge of fiction to the right and on the edge of fiction to the left. One is close to reality and one is close to something dreamlike.

There is also something to be said about the progression of this character, ES. Going back to *Homage by Assassination*, it's interesting for me to see the character evolving—who, in the screen and out of the screen, he and I became. There's an element of insecurity again: who it is that I wanted to be on the screen and who it is that I ended up being in *The Time That Remains*, what happened physically and spiritually to the character. I was a nice-looking guy in *Homage by Assassination*, who knew he had some kind of aura! I find that rather funny. I was so young. I never studied acting. It was a last-minute decision to be in front of the camera. But I had a feeling of what it meant. Anyway, there was something I could rely on—the physical as opposed to the conceptual. But then the confidence-building: who I am cinematically as a character also evolved and I would say that what you saw in *The Time That Remains* is the absolutely nothing-to-hide. So if you talk about stripteasing, then truly I became a real stripteaser only in *The Time That Remains*. I became more naked and without reserve. Here I'm not talking about my physicality, but the whole film. Yes it's stripteasing when you relive your mother being in the hospital and it's naked when you're filming in your own bedroom where you've lived all your life. It's stripteasing because you're really showing every little intimate detail of your life in the movie. A lot of what you saw in *The Time That Remains* is really what it is: my parents' house, my grandparents' house, the neighborhood where I grew up. Maybe there's no precise terminology, but the nakedness of it is an intention.

I think the character is like a ghost, a ghost of yourself, and that's the nature of its fictitiousness. But also a ghost because what comes to the fore nakedly in the persona in this film, and in its title, is the sadness, the grief, the sense of trauma. This is also to do with the relative lack of jokes in *The Time That Remains*.

Yes. I have a tremendous strong attraction to gags. I'm wondering how I will relate to the burlesque in the future. I'm hoping that I will retrieve it. In *The Time That Remains*, I didn't really know what determined the tonality of it exactly. I discovered that the film was sad, let's say, in the first cut. I brought some of my associates, friends to watch the film and I saw tears dripping from someone and I was shocked. I said: "You are crying!" And she said: "Yes, it breaks my heart when

CHRONICLE OF A DISAPPEARANCE AND *THE TIME THAT REMAINS*

Top four: *Chronicle of a Disappearance.* © 1996 Dhat Productions. DVD: Kino Video. Bottom four: *The Time That Remains.* Courtesy of New Wave Films.

I see your mother on the balcony with the music" [ES plays a CD to his mother at one point]. I did not know the extent. I knew it gave me a little melancholy. I knew this is my mother on the screen who has passed away. And by the way it's my aunt, her sister, who acts the role, because my mother passed away a couple of months before I started. And in fact I wrote the hospital scenes into the script. This was not the way the script originally progressed. There is a whole other part to the script because there was a finality that I could not but have to face, which is that my mother passed away. That is why the film ends that way. So this sadness is something I myself captured more or less (though there are plenty of funny things in the movie). Nonetheless I did not know that the tonality was actually burdened by that until it was finished, until it was shot and edited.

And I'm wondering now about the next film. I never have a full film in front of me, but I have an idea and this idea is attracting me and it's not at all in that tonality. Well, actually that's not correct. It has some of it, but it's the reverse if you take the ratio of my intention (because I never know what the film is really going to be like until I finish it). There will be melancholy, but there's a great attraction to very gaggy things—to things that I'm almost embarrassed to tell you! I'm so excited about scenes where I'm going to be so ridiculous to the point that I laugh when I think about how ridiculously I can portray myself.

The way you capture the everyday is important. In *The Time That Remains*, there is the scene in Ramallah: the street protest stops in order to let a woman with a buggy come through. But there is also the Kafkaesque, sinister everyday. You have talked about growing up in Nazareth: "People knew that if they wanted to be able to support their families or send their kids to school, they'd better keep their mouths shut. There were also lots of collaborators or informers around. So people lived in fear" [*Journal of Palestine Studies*, winter 2003, 67]—and this is strongly conveyed in the film; two denunciations occur. Will you say something about whether your quiet poetic economy in depicting the everyday is a form of resistance?

I could always tell you "yes." In a similar fashion to when the sheriff and his deputies in a Western, when there's a gang entering town, before they go out the door, they pick up the hanging shotguns and they leave. I could list what "resistance" means in cinema, just as simply as that: silence, for instance. It's so easy to list, but one has to always announce them again because if they start to become just the guns that you pick up in order to go and fight the bad guys, then you just become another counter-aggressor, and so just to say "silence is a tool of resistance" is not sufficient at all. One has to redefine always. The fact that I have to put myself to the effort of redefining or rephrasing is necessary. It is necessary always to speak about why silence is a tool of resistance, and why humor is a tool of resistance. I'm always with the fear that I will institutionalize the terminology by uttering it. The fact is one can always also turn silence into a counter-resistance. But, yes, silence can destabilize a certain microcosm of power. And that is the poetic also. I have faith that the poetics do have a role in destabilizing poles of authority. There is no exact way to describe what it is I do in terms of the poetics. But as long as it is felt that way—and more of us that feel it that way.

In other words: what determines exactly if a scene I directed falls in the category of poetic? It is probably that few of us think that way. I don't know of any other way to actually describe it. Which by the way reminds me of when someone asks me about the humor or the poetic in terms of "use of." How can you make a use of? I don't just open a cupboard and take a joke and throw it into the cinema. It's not an anecdote. The poetic is a very undefined space. It's an emotion that we feel when we are composing it or when we are receiving it. For the time being, this is a good description for what I'm calling the poetic. I don't know. I'm always talking and then counter-arguing myself. Maybe there is a more precise wording for it. It's not about intelligence. There is a sensation in the interior that evolves. This cosmos keeps rotating until a moment comes where you get a little sensation that this is it, and you decide to make this scene because you get a little euphoria. Instead of finding a center, you find the most decentered moment. You find the place where you are lost and it becomes the pleasure. But it's difficult to announce it until you have it in front of you and the scene was shot and it was successful.

There are two components. One is faith and one is doubt. I can give you an example: exploding the tank in *Divine Intervention*. You know the amount of energy it takes to explode a tank? A whole army in France had to be engaged in that! It was a real explosion. So much plastic explosive. We burnt the forest! It's obnoxious almost. This scene was in fact exactly in the script as it ended up. The father falls on the ground, ES drives along the highway eating the apricot, throws the pit out of the window, and the tank explodes. You really have to have a lot of faith to do a scene like that. It scares me when I talk to you to think if I could ever do this again. Now that I know it exists I'm happy that I don't have to do it again! But you have to have so much faith that this moment will do something to a spectator—and at the same time have so much doubt that you keep coming back to yourself, that you make sure to yourself that you aren't just being pompous or arrogant. There's so much checking. You pull your hair going back and forth. Anyway this is how I work. Sometimes I see a director being so cynical about his spectators, so full of contempt, without any respect for spectators that he will shoot a scene that will cheat them.

There is one scene in *The Time That Remains* that stands out for me in relation to the poetic: the 1948 denunciation. Fuad is led into a walled orchard where blindfolded prisoners have been forced to kneel among the trees. It is very quiet: insects chirp, the wind blows. Before Fuad is interrogated and threatened at gunpoint, you cut between a close-up of his blindfolded face and a POV shot—the low, old wall and the ancient landscape behind it which he would be seeing if he were not blindfolded. Can you say something about this scene, which seems to me to be poetic in its representation of an impossible viewpoint?

Yes, but he *is* seeing it. There's a political sentiment that I have to insert into this. The fact is that this is Palestine that now is being, at this very moment, lost, and Fuad can see it and is saying at the same time farewell to it for the last time. That's really what these images are saying. And then there's the fadeout, the cut to black. But this cut to black is resisting and is almost a testimony to the fact that Palestine exists even if he doesn't see it (but he's seeing it at the same time). So it's a complex reason why this image is there. I'm saying: even if he is blind, he can see. He can always refer to it in this theological fashion.

Is ES's mother looking at the same thing when she's sitting on the balcony. Is she looking at a lost or imagined homeland?

No. There is absolutely the personal and individualistic sentiment of the older person who's had enough. After my father passed away, my mother was living with this very, very intense personal solitude. It was not really happy especially, and this is what you are seeing on the balcony.

At times in your films, fantasy erupts into the fiction—most memorably the ninja-fighting sequence in *Divine Intervention*. It seems to me that fantasy is less prominent in *The Time That Remains*, but there is one notable exception, a scene in which ES pole-vaults the Israeli security wall. What does this sequence signify? It might seem like a fantasy of escape, of flight—an exit rather than the confrontation that occurs between the Palestinian ninja and the Israeli soldiers in *Divine Intervention*. Do you acknowledge any privileging of pathos over politics in *The Time That Remains*?

No, but there is no simple answer, and the complexity of my position is exemplified in this jump. Of course I am escaping, but in the narrative, it's escape from the obscenity of the situation—from solders who start to dance, all the burlesque in Ramallah with the tank. In the narrative, the character cannot take it and so he's just leaving. He escaped to Ramallah from Nazareth and the sadness of the situation. He then goes to Ramallah and finds it completely obscene and strange and burlesque, and he jumps over the wall because there is no exit. I think this duality between the personal and the political, and the burlesque and the antipolitical, is something that has been in all my films. All the time when I am speaking about politics, I am escaping it. So I am walking a thin rope.

But you mentioned something that is slightly painful. You said: as opposed to the ninja. I realize why it was painful. The ninja has all the potentiality to win a fight, and all the propaganda—flags, all that. So I played this game and I went almost to the extreme of the hero winning, only to find out that at the end of the ninja sequence, she disappears, she becomes an image. In fact she is an image only. She comes out of the target and she returns to the target. In fact nobody won anything. She did not come to earth to win and then leave us with a victory. For in the scene after, what do we have? It's ES, completely impotent; he cannot even cry. He doesn't even have the power to shed a tear. He cuts an onion to cry, which is the total other extreme. This is what I'm talking about! I put this very playful imagined hero that comes to save us from Israel, only to tell you after that ES is unable even to cry. So you have these two extremes, the personal and the political.

***The Time That Remains* is bookended by strange scenes in which ES is driven in a taxi around a no-place in torrential rain and darkness. The taxi driver cannot find any landmarks. Is this a landscape of despair?**

The fact that I'm making a film in that landscape [in Israel] escapes a "yes" answer. The fact that I make a film is a sign of hope. Yes, it's a landscape of despair, but if it's truly despair, why do I make a film in it? I make films because I'm always hopeful that something will save such a place. And I say "such a place" because I am never just talking about despair in one place and not the despair of another. Because I think the despair exists here and it exists everywhere. I think this lobby [where the interview was occuring] is probably a quite theatrical image of the absolute magnitude of despair: for me, this is a place I cannot know how to film and I cannot know how to change. I cannot metamorphose it. I cannot even think how. Here's a place where I don't know if the world will change. But back there, with all that people think is murder and killing and terrorism and victimized and victimizing—that is a place with a certain poetics for me that I can actually make a film in and make you laugh there, and a lot. I cannot make you laugh here. I hate that sort of despair that I experience when I cannot do anything about it. Here, if you want, is where hell can begin for me.

ROB WHITE is editor of *Film Quarterly*.

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ABSTRACT An interview with Palestinian director Elia Suleiman in which he discusses family history, the influence of Ozu and others, his films' poetic qualities and their politics, with particular emphasis on *The Time That Remains*.

KEYWORDS Elia Suleiman, *The Time That Remains*, *Divine Intervention*, *Chronicle of a Disappearance*, Palestinian cinema

SOLIDARITY NOT IDENTIFICATION: STRAUB–HUILLET'S RADICAL CINEMA

MARK FISHER REVIEWS NEW DVD RELEASES OF FILMS BY JEAN-MARIE STRAUB AND DANIÈLE HUILLET

"To love a painting you need first to have drunk it in like this, in long draughts. You must lose consciousness. Go down with the painter to the dark, tangled roots of things and rise up again from them with the colours, open up with them in the light. Learn how to see. To feel . . ." These words attributed to Cézanne, from Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *A Visit to the Louvre* (2004), might serve as a statement of intent for the two filmmakers. The film distils many of the signature features of their craft: the use of an already existing text (it is said that their films use only a few lines of original dialogue, and in this case the text is the poet Joachim Gasquet's book, *Cézanne*), the static camera shots, the lingering and apparently unmotivated pans across unpopulated landscapes. But here the filmmakers' desire "to teach us how to see" comes without even the minimal sugarcoating of a plot: *A Visit to the Louvre* places us in front of paintings from the museum, with only Cézanne's commentary for company. It ends with a 360-degree pan of a Tuscan hillside, whose relationship to what has preceded it—long shots of fifteen works of art on display in the Louvre—is left oblique. Here we have a classic example of the so-called "Straubian shot." Suddenly and seemingly inexplicably, the camera turns away to the landscape, remaining focused on empty space for a number of minutes, almost as if it has forgotten the film's "official" narrative.

This elliptical methodology means that, for Straub and Huillet, teaching how to see does not amount to telling the audience what they are seeing. Nothing could be more alien to the populist discourse that neoliberalism has naturalized than the idea that culture should demand something of the audience. "I don't think much of democracy," Straub says in an interview with Manfred Blank included in the new edition of *Class Relations* (1984), "because it's always the lowest common denominator. We want the opposite of that—the highest common denominator, the broadest common denominator." Although there is definitely a pedagogic dimension to Straub–Huillet's work, they do not instruct the audience so much as they demand a certain kind of participation—a participation that is far from Web 2.0's twitchy interactivity as it is from traditional cinema's supine spectatorship. In her *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, Jodi Dean has argued that Web 2.0's rhetoric of involvement is a cover for a "communicative capitalism," and it's tempting to see Straub–Huillet's work as a kind of noncommunicative anticapitalism. It neither prepackages a subjectivity for its spectators, nor does it force them to consume a message. The directors' refusal to "communicate" means that the audience are never allowed to passively absorb the films. We must engage. Straub–Huillet's work can be visually ravishing, but it never allows us to melt into the screen, either via absorption into a plot or by identification with characters (see also mubi.com/notebook/posts/245).

This Brechtian requirement that the viewer retain a critical distance is one reason that Straub–Huillet have a reputation for being forbidding. Their work has been inaccessible on a more banal level—few of their films have been released on DVD, and they remain largely unavailable in the U.S. It is difficult to know how to even refer to the pair. Up until Huillet's death in 2006, Straub directed and Huillet edited, but they were effectively co-directors, and the convention has been to refer to them as "Straub–Huillet," a designation that suggests an entity, tellingly, that is both single and collective. (Now, to add a further complication, it is becoming increasingly common to put Huillet's name first.)

Their work is evidently born of a sensibility formed in a different era. In his *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Athlone, 1989), Gilles Deleuze claims that, along with Resnais, Straub–Huillet are "probably the greatest political filmmakers in the West, in modern cinema" (215). Both Deleuze and Straub–Huillet belong to the generation that emerged in

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Top left: *Work on "Class Relations" by Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* (Harun Farocki, 1983). Top right: *How Merrily I Shall Laugh: Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub and Their Film "Class Relations"* (Manfred Blank, 1984). DVD: Edition Filmmuseum (Austria). Bottom two: *A Visit to the Louvre.* Fonds Images de France du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. DVD: New Wave Films (U.K.).

the moment after the repudiation of Stalinism but before capitalism had become the only game in town—a moment still characterized by the conviction that political art would have to be as experimental as the new social arrangements it hoped to engineer. It isn't only the political context that has changed since (in a supposedly post-ideological era, Straub–Huillet remained avowed Marxists); nor can the difference between then and now be registered solely in the receding confidence of the avant-garde. In a moment dominated by what the writer Linda Stone calls "continuous partial attention" (see lindastone.net), Straub–Huillet's work finds itself further than ever from the mainstream. What their films need is precisely the audience's undivided attention, something that it is increasingly difficult for viewers to muster. Hollywood neurotically chases after attention as it flees and fragments; but Straub–Huillet's films imperiously refuse to give any ground at all. Reduced to bullet-point summaries or watched with one eye on the laptop and one hand hovering above the fast-forward button, they yield nothing: these films belong in the cinema, with its darkness and its ritual separation from the rhythms of everyday life.

What, then, are we to make of the release of four of Straub–Huillet's films on DVD—*Class Relations* and *Three Films: Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet*, a set which comprises *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968), *Sicily!* (1999), and *A Visit to the Louvre*? And how are we to watch them? On the one hand, it needs to be said that watching Straub–Huillet's work on a television at home is unusually problematic. The domestic environment, with its multiple possibilities for distraction, inevitably dissipates the concentration that the work requires. On the other hand, though, given that the films are so rarely screened in cinemas, these editions provide an invaluable opportunity—and perhaps even the only opportunity—to get at least an initial sense of the work. It has to be stressed that Straub–Huillet did not want their films to be watched only by film buffs and intellectuals; but perhaps

the audience that they did seek—the masses who would appreciate their brand of Brechtian modernism—has not yet come into being. Or—to be more gloomy—perhaps the moment when it might have come into being has been and gone.

Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2* that Straub–Huillet "know how to show how the people are what is missing" (215). After Hitler, after Stalin, Deleuze argues, it was no longer possible to believe that the masses were a readymade political subject that were about to take the reins of world history. The urgent task was not to organize the masses into a party, but to point to the absence of any viable revolutionary political subject—in the hope of bringing a new kind of subject into being. Revolutionaries in the west, Deleuze claims, found themselves plunged into the situation of the third world, "where oppressed and exploited nations remained in a state of perpetual minorities, in a collective identity crisis" (217). Straub–Huillet indicated their solidarity with such minorities many times: take for instance Straub's dedication of *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* to the Viet Cong, or his more recent declaration that "as long as American imperialistic capitalism exists, there won't be enough terrorists in the world" (2006 message to the Venice International Film Festival, www.mastersofcinema.org/straub.html). Straub took the side of the minorities (and himself entered into a kind of minority) when he fled from France in 1958, in order to avoid being conscripted into the Algerian war.

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Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach was supposed to have been Straub and Huillet's first project together. The aim was to tell the story of Bach's life from 1721, when he married Anna Magdalena, his second wife, up until his death in 1750. Straub and Huillet began work on it in 1954, but it was only realized fourteen years later, when it became their "first feature." The inverted commas are necessary here because, like much of Straub–Huillet's work, the film defies easy categorization. As Barton Byg relates in *Landscapes of Resistance: The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* (University of California Presss, 1995), Straub joked exasperatedly that the project was refused funding both on the grounds that it was a fiction film and that it was a documentary. Although the chronicle of the title was not a real historical document—Anna Magdalena did not keep a diary—this is practically Straub–Huillet's only fictional contrivance. (The English author Esther Meynell wrote a sentimental book called *The Little Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* in 1925, but the only thing that Straub–Huillet borrowed from this novel is its title.) Straub–Huillet synthesized Anna Magdalena's so-called chronicle from historical sources, including Bach's correspondence.

When one compares *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* with a conventional biopic, one is struck by two things: the centrality of music and the absence of any psychological interiority. Straub wanted the music not to be simply the background to the film, but the raw material from which it was made. Accordingly, the film consists for the most part of performances of works composed by Bach, presented in chronological sequence, and stitched together by a first-person narration by Anna Magdalena (played by Christiane Lang). Straub–Huillet were deeply sensitive to sound, and they insisted on the use of direct as opposed to dubbed sound. This film is at least as much about learning to hear as it is about learning to see. All of the music in *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* was performed and recorded on set—hiring the musicians was the main reason that the film turned out to be unexpectedly expensive. The performances are filmed with a near-immobile camera which stays trained on the musicians throughout; there are no audience reaction shots, indeed no sign of any audience at all. It is as if Straub–Huillet were counterposing the "real" of the musical performance—the music is recorded as it was performed, which was almost exactly the way that audiences in Bach's own time would have heard it—to the supposed "realism" of mainstream cinema. Straub–Huillet make few concessions to the demands of this realism. Bach, for instance, played by the Dutch harpsichordist Gustav Leonhardt, shows no signs of aging throughout.

But the filmmakers' greatest deviation from biopic convention comes with their refusal to constitute Bach as a "well-rounded character." Their Bach is a Brechtian cipher whose personality never comes into focus. The viewer is given no emotional hooks to latch onto. The fact that Bach and Anna Magdalena had seven children who died before the age of five is downplayed rather than exploited for emotional leverage. We learn of some of Bach's disappointments with one of his adult children, but mostly Anna Magdalena's narrative focuses on the quotidian details of Bach's struggles with his employers, his commissions, and his money problems. Bach, then, appears as a worker. The film is thus a demystification but not a desublimation: Bach is not figured as a "great man," but it is difficult to imagine a film that would showcase his music more reverently. In the interview that is one of the extras with *Class Relations*, Straub disdains the view that he identified with Bach, but it is impossible to ignore the parallels between Bach's struggles and the difficulties Straub–Huillet had in bringing their film to the screen. Yet ultimately these parallels are not a question of identification but of solidarity.

SICILY!

Pierre Grise Productions, Centre National de la Cinématographie, Alia Film, Istituto Luce. DVD: New Wave Films.

The other two films in the set come from much later in Straub–Huillet's career. *Sicily!* is based on the novel *Conversations in Sicily* by Elio Vittorini. Here we see an unnamed traveler (Gianni Buscarino) returning to Sicily after time away. "One of the main reasons *Sicilia!* worked," according to Straub in Jean-Charles Fitoussi's 2001 documentary, *Sicilia! Si gira*, "is that the bourgeoisie likes to have a protagonist with an initatic [sic] journey, and preferably to find back his/her mother, etc. That's why *Bach* worked. One can't change the vices of the bourgeoisie." In fact, *Sicily!*'s traveler is a protagonist only in a very weak sense. He functions more like an interviewer, a slate as blank as Straub–Huillet's largely static camera, speaking in turn to others with whom he is waiting at a port (they discuss the declining market for oranges), a group of men in a railway carriage, his mother (Angela Nugara), and a knife-sharpener.

Perhaps the minimal concession to "bourgeois" narrative structure here allows some of their techniques to be more easily appreciated. There is another example of a Straubian shot: at one point during the railway carriage scene, the camera leaves the characters on the train to show instead the apparently empty landscape outside for several minutes. I say "apparently" because it is important to question our unreflective assumption that such spaces are indeed empty. Deleuze maintains in *Cinema 2* that, in Straub–Huillet's films, an "empty space, without characters . . . has a fullness in which there is nothing missing" (245). One has to learn to see such "fullness," which is not likely to be perceived by the casual viewer, who is more likely to find the Straubian shots frustrating and boring. How is Deleuze's idea of fullness to be understood in this context? It is worth noting that Deleuze sees geology as continuous with politics. The idea of social "stratification" is not just a vague metaphor in Deleuze's work, but rather an expression of the way in which both human populations and the earth are shaped by vast impersonal processes. The unpeopled is therefore not the same as the empty.

In *Sicily!*, a (lost) relationship between politics and landscape is invoked when the traveler speaks to his mother, in a scene in which William Lubtchansky's high-contrast black-and-white cinematography is shown off to magnificent effect. She recalls the old peasant culture, rooted both in a relationship to the earth and in politics. The scene turns on her contemptuous comparison of her husband—seemingly an effete sort of man who writes poetry for his lovers but who was too weak to help her when she was giving birth—with her own father, "a great socialist." *Sicily!* ends on an unexpectedly joyous note, with the traveler and the knife-sharpener making a list of all the things that make the world a "wonderful place." Yet this feels like a comic-choric epilogue; it is the difficult exchange between the traveler and his mother that leaves the strongest impression.

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Class Relations is an adaptation of the Kafka novella that came to be called *Amerika*. (Kafka had originally preferred the title *The Man Who Disappeared*; it was eventually retitled *Amerika* by Kafka's literary executor Max Brod.) Karl Rossman's journey is the opposite of that of the traveler in *Sicily!*—away from home not toward it—but he is equally blank. Straub–Huillet's strategy here is to make Rossmann sympathetic but not someone the audience identifies with. Learning to see here means not replicating Rossmann's self-understandings—or self-misunderstandings—but apprehending the class structures which he grasps only dimly.

In the intriguing interview with Manfred Blank that is included on the *Class Relations* extras disc, Straub refuses to see Rossmann (Christian Heinisch) as a "protagonist," referring to him instead as a "recurring character." Rossmann does not have enough agency to be a protagonist. He is instead a victim of circumstance, sent to America because he was seduced by an older woman whom he impregnated. Projected out of his former position of class privilege, he finds himself among the dispossessed and the precarious, making temporary friendships and alliances with a stoker on the ship, a hotel cook, a couple of drifters, and a singer. In the notes he wrote for the DVD, Barton Byg, who worked with Huillet on providing the English subtitles, observes that "Karl Rossmann is not only looking for a 'job' as he wanders America but for a place in the world. For that reason, Danièle urged me to be very careful with the words relating to 'Stelle'—which means more than a job. We considered the resonances among all the worlds relating to jobs, unemployment, and work which also connect to place and position."

The quest for a place in the world haunts Kafka's characters: for K in *The Castle*, the position of land surveyor is also more than just a job, while, after his arrest, Joseph K in *The Trial* feels that his place has been lost and struggles in vain to regain it. Byg refers to a scene on the ship when, after Rossmann has interceded on behalf of the stoker, Rossmann's wealthy and successful uncle tells him: "don't push too far, if only out of love for me, and learn to comprehend your place." Yet the overwhelming message of *Class Relations* is that it is not possible for Rossmann to "comprehend his place," because he no longer has an assigned position. Cast out from his standing in the rigid hierarchical class structure of Old Europe, Rossmmann finds himself not so much in a land of

CHRONICLE OF ANNA MAGDALENA BACH AND *CLASS RELATIONS*

Top two: *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. Franz Seitz Filmproduktion, Gianvittorio Baldi IDI Cinematografica, Straub-Huillet, Kuratorium Junger Deutscher Film, Hessischer Rundfunk, Filmfonds e.V., Telepool. DVD: New Wave Films. Others: *Class Relations*. Janus, Hessischen Rundfunk, NEF Diffusion. DVD: Edition Filmmuseum (Austria).

opportunity where all are free to make their own destiny as in a world of perpetual anxiety—a world in which, as Straub points out in the interview with Blank, everyone fears losing their job. *Class Relations* is a film about the condition of precarity (short-term jobs and no long-term security) that increasing numbers of Europeans have been thrown into since Straub–Huillet made the film in 1984: we are all Amerikans now.

In the same interview, Straub also notes Richard Roud's observation that the title *Class Relations* could have been given to ninety percent of all films—but here the title is deliberately ironic, and in a sense misleading, for the classes do not "relate" at all. Daniel Fairfax writes in "Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet" (*Senses of Cinema* no. 52) of the way that members "of different social classes inhabit 'scenographic islands' in the film, which are only crossed by violent gestures shown in elliptical fashion: a random hand grabs a throat, arms shove a torso out of frame." Straub–Huillet underscore this nonrelationship between classes by the way that they use professional and nonprofessional actors. "Just as in Kafka characters in a position of power use a highly technocratic, verbose language to dominate their subordinates," Fairfax explains, "so too do the professional actors playing them impart their charisma and 'screen presence' to manipulate the spectator, while the non-professionals playing the more lowly characters speak in mechanical phrases chopped up by drawn out syncopations." Instead of relations between classes, there is only a "system of dependence," as Kafka called capitalism (Straub tells Blank that this remark of Kafka's was one of the starting points for the project)—but, evidently, the way that the rich depend on the poor is very different from the way the poor depend on the rich.

Also in black-and-white, *Class Relations*' America is fantasmatic without being oneiric—perhaps one of the reasons that Straub–Huillet chose to film this novella was that it meant they could avoid the dreamlike transitions and topographies which dominate Kafka's better-known novels. But this is still a fantasy America, in that it is deeply European. What we at first think is the Statue of Liberty turns out to be the replica in the Seine, and the film was mostly shot in Hamburg. Partly this reflects a certain kind of immigrant experience—in the interview with Blank, the filmmakers note that Rossmann moves from German-speaking group to German-speaking group. But it also accurately captures the "America" that Kafka—who of course never visited the U.S.—described. Straub–Huillet's America is as anachronistic as it is displaced—helicopters circle the Statue of Liberty, but when Rossmmann encounters a policeman towards the end of the film, the cop looks like a British bobby from the 1920s. There are persistent echoes of silent-era comedies—appropriate, perhaps, since Kafka's own fictions, with their mood of quiet panic, their pratfalls and the leering omnipresence of a pitiless Law, feel as if they could be grim versions of a Chaplin or Keaton film.

The extras DVD that comes with *Class Relations* also includes Harun Farocki's *Work on "Class Relations" by Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* from 1983, which shows the filmmakers on set working with the actors, and Klaus Kanzog and Klaus Volmer's 2007 *Work in Progress: Genetic Analysis of the Sign Structure and Rhetoric in the Opening Sequences of the Film "Class Relations" on the Basis of Unused Texts*, which is comprised of alternate takes. These two contextualizing films give an invaluable insight into Straub–Huillet's working methods and into their very acute, minutely focused attention to detail: Farocki's documentary, for instance, makes it clear that Straub–Huillet were at least as interested in the way that dialogue functioned as rhythmic blocks of sound as they were in its meaning. On set and in the interview with Blank, Straub and Huillet are a study in contrasts: he, sitting in a chair, a cigarette permanently clamped in his jaws, both garrulous and wary; she, sitting on the floor, her back to the wall, occasionally interrupting him—but more often being interrupted by him, yet always maintaining a quiet authority.

In the interview with Blank, Straub and Huillet discuss the placing of the camera in *Class Relations*. They wanted the camera to have a point of view that was not "objective" but also that was not Karl's. Creating this point of view was a technical feat that, Straub says, was akin to a chess puzzle. Again, the issue is not one of identification—the refusal to align the camera's point of view with that of the Rossmann character denies the viewers that option—but one of solidarity. What could sum up their Brechtian Marxism better than the invention of what Huillet calls this "brotherly" point of view?

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DVD DATA *Klassenverhhältnisse* [*Class Relations*]. Directors: Danièle Huillet, Jean-Marie Straub, 1984. Publisher: Edition Filmmuseum. €31.99, 2 discs.

Three Films: Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub—Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach, Sicilia!, Une Visite à Louvre. Directors: Danièle Huillet, Jean-Marie Straub, 1967, 1998, 2004. Publisher: New Wave Films. £19.99, 2 discs.

ABSTRACT A review of work by Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub—*Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1967), *Class Relations* (1984), *Sicily!* (1998), and *A Visit to the Louvre* (2004)—which discusses the "Straubian shot," use of sound and music, and the films' demand for a fully attentive and "fraternal" form of spectatorship.

KEYWORDS Danièle Huillet, Jean-Marie Straub, *Class Relations*, *Sicily!*, Deleuze and cinema

TEARS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The uncomfortable thing about the Tribeca Film Festival (April 21–May 2, 2010) is that nobody knows exactly what it is for. This may be a problem that it will never solve. It is not prestigious enough to woo any really good stuff away from Cannes, and in any case Venice and Berlin are always vigilant about picking up that festival's scraps. In the U.S., Tribeca does not really pretend to compete with Sundance, and even in New York City, its hometown, the website of the Mayor's Office of Theater, Film, and Broadcasting currently lists *forty-six* other festivals taking place within the city limits. It wasn't this way at first, of course. Tribeca was founded in the winter of 2002 by Jane Rosenthal and Robert De Niro, who wanted to pump money into a lower Manhattan that had recently been devastated by having planes smashed into it. The founders were very explicit about the primacy of an economic justification for the festival's existence. "The reason we started the film festival was really to help the economic redevelopment of Lower Manhattan very specifically," Rosenthal said to a *New York Times* reporter in 2003.

By that metric, it's hard to see the festival as anything other than an enormous success. In 2006, Tribeca placed twelfth on *Forbes* magazine's list of the country's most expensive zip codes (median home price: $1.9 million), and as I walked across lower Manhattan from screening to screening, it was easy to see that the neighborhood's success had turned into a more general phenomenon. One Sunday afternoon, in a half-hour break between films, I hopped into something called a Milk Bar and spent sixteen dollars on a sandwich and a cookie. At the other end of the counter, a young man took digital photos of his own sandwich—for a blog, I assumed, or maybe a review on Yelp—and once or twice moved the plate in an effort to improve the lighting. None of this can be solely credited to the Tribeca Film Festival, but it is a fact that De Niro's dream took shape in almost perfect synchronization with its neighborhood's makeover. In the weeks leading up to Tribeca's opening night, pre-festival screenings were held on the second floor of a building that also contained Locanda Verde, a new restaurant, owned by De Niro, that serves "family-style" Italian food on small plates, all of it in rigid keeping with New York's current culinary fashions. I would like to complain about gentrification, but unfortunately I'm in my early twenties: I literally have no idea what an un-gentrified lower Manhattan is supposed to look or feel like. In any case, my sandwich at that milk place was *delicious*.

Even in the theaters, it was impossible to forget about the urban surroundings. In an ad for American Express that played before every single screening, movers loaded a truck with bubble-wrapped New York signifiers: to-go cups of coffee, pigeons, a pretty ditz with a BlackBerry glued to her ear, a profane meter maid. "Thanks for coming to this year's festival," read the text at the end. "Because bringing it to you would have been a real nightmare." Consider the tone set. Through documentaries and features, experimental shorts, and *Shrek 4* on the opening night, the vaguely sinister ambition of the festival's slogan loomed always in the background: "Here comes the neighborhood."

In that spirit, I'll begin with the film that best represented the festival as a whole. Nicole Holofcener's *Please Give* is a small, subtle movie about liberal guilt that has enjoyed wide acclaim since its limited theatrical release on April 30. Its central characters, Kate (Catherine Keener) and Alex (Oliver Platt), are a married couple waiting for their old neighbor Andra (Ann Guilbert) to die. This is because they have bought her apartment, which they plan to take over once Andra gets wheeled out for good. Kate, who happens to make her living from the recently deceased as well (she runs a vintage furniture shop, supplied mostly by estate sales, with Alex), feels guilty about this, and makes tentative stabs at assuaging her guilt through volunteering and feeding the homeless.

Many people loved this movie for its intelligent writing and terrific acting—visually, it looks like any other mainstream New York romantic comedy—but ultimately I could not. First, greedily waiting for a neighbor to die isn't monstrous, just petty, and because of this Kate's guilt quickly curdles into little more than narcissism. As a liberal, I know as well as anyone how good it can feel to feel bad about something, but at a certain point it's time to either change your life or accept your shortcomings. This raises the second major issue with *Please Give*, which is that the possibility of changing her life in a major way never occurs to Kate even once. Actually she doesn't even make it to changing her life in a minor way, abandoning her volunteer efforts after the sadness of children with Down Syndrome becomes too much to bear. All the while, Kate and Alex are raising a teenage daughter,

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Into Eternity
Courtesy of Tribeca Film Festival.

Abby (Sarah Steele), who through a mix of privilege and adolescent insecurity seems on her way to becoming a truly awful adult. In the film's closing scene, Kate repairs her relationship with Abby by buying her a $250 pair of jeans.

In the hands of a different filmmaker, I could have been willing to read this incredibly unhappy ending as a final, decisive critique of Kate's all-too-vague dreams of less materialistic living. But in interviews Holofcener is up-front about identifying more or less completely with her protagonists, making Keener the director's onscreen stand-in. "Obviously, I know too much about it," Holofcener told the *Seattle Times*, referring to the kind of upscale secondhand furniture store that Kate owns. "I shop in those stores!" There is nothing inherently or necessarily wrong with buying expensive furniture; but if, as Kate does, you suspect that there might be something hollow about devoting so much of your life to the consumption of luxuries, it does not suffice to mistake awareness for action and call the problem solved. Holofcener's vague feelings of guilt and even vaguer means of dispelling it turn *Please Give* into a symptom of the problem it was trying to solve, an appropriate (and somewhat sad) emblem of its time and place.

These depressing thoughts were countered by the energy and ambition of the festival's documentary features. Two of them were particular highlights, though each for different reasons. Deborah Scranton's *Earth Made of Glass* is a simple, almost literally unbelievable film about a Rwandan man's efforts to find the remains of his father, who was murdered at a roadblock during the 1994 genocide. Scranton spends half the film with President Paul Kagame as he tries to stitch the country together, and while this is a very compelling story, it doesn't translate to film with anything like the visceral power of Jean Pierre Sagahutu's search. Sagahutu works for a media company in the booming city of Kigali. He lost three sisters, two brothers, and both his parents between April and July of 1994. Sagahutu owes his own survival to the friend who lowered food down into the working septic tank where he hid for two months and sixteen days. He is smart and articulate, also a devoted father, and he serves as a brilliant foil to President Kagame's sloganeering. "You can't let yourself be held hostage by the guilt of the past," Kagame says in one interview, but Sagahutu is understandably pessimistic about his own capacities for forgiveness: "I don't see any hope for me." Incredibly, Sagahutu manages to track down one of the men who was present at his father's murder. The results of their conversation are best left to the film itself. But in the United States, a country that remains simultaneously obsessed with genocides past and unable to acknowledge horrors of the present day, *Earth Made of Glass* is a revelatory look at the simple human mechanics of anger, evil, and (theoretically) forgiveness.

With *Earth Made of Glass*, Deborah Scranton had a story that more or less told itself, and so she made the intelligent decision to keep her filmmaking as simple as possible. Danish filmmaker Michael Madsen had a different approach. His documentary, *Into Eternity*, is an ingenious film that gets torpedoed by its director's opinion that he is definitely a genius. The film is about Finland's efforts to construct a storage facility for its nuclear waste that must last for 100,000 years—roughly fifty times the span between the present day and the construction of the Egyptian pyramids. There is no human construction that has lasted anywhere near this long, and Madsen's interviews with the bureaucrats in charge of the task would make Kafka howl with laughter. Unfortunately, Kafka might have a similar response to Madsen himself, who seems unaware of the role he plays in making *Into Eternity* so unsettling. The film's subtitle is *A Film for the Future*, and so of course Madsen appears onscreen (three times) to deliver monologues that are literally addressed to inhabitants of a world to come. These scenes are lit by a single match, which flickers attractively across Madsen's thick black glasses as he speaks directly to the camera: "Man discovered fire, but he could not put the fire out . . ." It is, somewhat unintentionally, a perfect dramatization of our inability to deal with the consequences of technological progress.

These and other documentaries—Clio Barnard's experimental *The Arbor*, Jennilyn Merten's *Sons of Perdition*, and especially Alex Gibney's work-in-progress, *Untitled Eliot Spitzer Film*—seemed to generate most of the excitement at what was otherwise a pretty subdued festival. Anglo-American feature films, in particular, made a very modest showing. Of those I saw, only British director J. Blakeson's *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*, a well-made, clever take on the perfect-plan-gone-wrong thriller, stuck in my memory. Even that film seemed less a full-bodied production than an audition

Lola and *The White Meadows*
Courtesy of Tribeca Film Festival.

for a studio contract and larger Hollywood budget. "Give me money," seemed to be the message Blakeson's film wanted to telegraph to Hollywood producers. "I'll know what to do with it."

The international features on view at Tribeca were another story. Viewers familiar with *Kinatay*, the disturbing film that won Filipino director Brillante Mendoza the Best Director award at Cannes in 2009—also the film that Roger Ebert, in a fit of offended decency, called the single worst in the festival's history—will be shocked by his latest work, *Lola*. The film's only killing takes place before the movie even begins, and in place of *Kinatay*'s existential urban horror, *Lola* displays a quiet, dignified humanism that recalls nobody so much as Jean Renoir: Mendoza is the rare director who can accept his characters' shortcomings without endorsing or sentimentalizing them. The title is the Filipino word for "grandma," and the film's central concern is how two women, Lola Sepa (Anita Linda) and Lola Carpin (Rustica Carpio), try to negotiate the fact that one's grandson has killed the other in a street robbery. Mendoza's handheld camera occasionally comes dangerously close to making a joke out of its concern for realism, but it also does a wonderful job evoking the physical precariousness of old age. In the film's opening sequence, Lola Sepa pauses in the pouring rain to catch her breath, and the camera looks up at the stairs she must ascend to get home. It seems completely impossible, but of course Lola Sepa puts her head down and starts to climb. Anita Linda's performance was the festival's best.

The only film I saw to equal *Lola* could not be more unlike it. Iranian director Mohammad Rasoulof's *The White Meadows* is a strange, absolutely gorgeous parable about the meaning of tradition in contemporary Iran. Its protagonist is Rahmat (Hasan Pourshirazi), who crisscrosses Lake Urmia in a tiny boat. His job is to collect tears. The villages he visits on Urmia's shores hunker down in dazzling, salt-caked landscapes, each simultaneously sustained and oppressed by its own particular rituals. One sends a dwarf into a well with hundreds of jars, each one the container for somebody's sorrows, and then cuts his rope when he fails to climb out before sunrise. Another marries off its most beautiful woman to the sea, and sends her sobbing into the distance on a floating platform. In this last example, the political subtext is obviously not difficult to make out, but Rasoulof does a wonderful job of varying the extent to which his set pieces indicate a specific political referent; sometimes they are allegories, but sometimes they are just independent mythological worlds. These vignettes are filmed in a style that reinforces the viewer's impression that Rasoulof is speaking through parables. The almost completely stationary camera suggests the panels of a picture book, and with the color palette limited to white, black, and the brilliant azure sky, *The White Meadows* can look less filmed than illustrated. There is, furthermore, a feeling of physical improbability—a house on gratuitous stilts, the dwarf loaded down with mason jars—that keeps any sense of realism at a charming (and probably necessary) arm's length. (Rasoulof is, after all, working in a country that doesn't tolerate political critique. He was actually arrested a month before *The White Meadows* screened at Tribeca.) What's most surprising, though—and this doesn't become clear at all until the film's conclusion—is the intense ambivalence that Rasoulof seems to feel toward his own project. What Rahmat ultimately does with the tears he's collected is shocking, an indictment of Iran's political regime that is simultaneously a gesture of bitter self-deprecation. If one film from Tribeca deserves a wider audience, *The White Meadows* is it.

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JOBS WELL DONE

According to the speculation that always accompanies the run-up to the announcement of the Cannes Film Festival program, the 2010 edition (May 12–23) was almost certain to premiere new films by Terrence Malick and Béla Tarr. In the event, neither Malick's *The Tree of Life* nor Tarr's *The Turin Horse* made it (the former wasn't finished in time; the latter, who knows?), and these high-profile absences added to a sense of disappointment with a competition line-up that generally lacked big-name auteurs. Perhaps the competition wasn't as rich as previous years; certainly there was no *Antichrist*-style controversy this time and no film generated the same acclaim as *The White Ribbon* or *A Prophet* did in 2009. I had bad luck with the two competition films I managed to watch: Bertrand Tavernier's *The Princess of Montpensier* is a terribly creaky chivalric historical romance; and Abbas Kiarostami's *Certified Copy*, a talky drama about a couple who may or may not be pretending to be lovers, sees the Iranian director swap his usual nimble intelligence for plodding observations about the nature of artifice and deception.

Much more interesting was Manoel de Oliveira's *The Strange Case of Angelica*. Playing in the Un Certain Regard strand, it tells of Isaak, a shy photographer living in rural Portugal who is commissioned to take the portrait of a beautiful young woman who has died only days after her wedding. Captivated by the image of her corpse, artfully laid out to rest before burial, Isaak falls under a ghostly spell. He becomes increasingly withdrawn from village life, and—in sequences of beguiling Méliès-like fantasy—dreams of flying through the night sky with her. If *The Strange Case of Angelica*'s dialogue scenes between the fellow guests in Isaak's boarding house are a little stiff, and the film's ruminative tone never quite makes for fully engaged emotional drama, its reflections on impermanence, mortality, and the changing world convey great pathos. As well as Isaak's obsession with the deceased Angelica, *The Strange Case of Angelica* charts his parallel fascination with photographing agricultural workers who are tilling the nearby fields, eschewing machinery (just as Isaak, who is encumbered for much of the picture with an antiquated camera around his neck, has renounced digital technology). Those lengthy, mostly wordless sequences of Isaak following a line of men as they undertake backbreaking work inevitably evoke the perseverance and resilience of Oliveira himself, who has been making films since 1942. The audience gave the Portuguese director a standing ovation even before his film screened, the latest of many warm receptions that he has enjoyed at Cannes. Long may it continue.

About twenty years younger than Oliveira, the venerable documentary director Frederick Wiseman is almost as prodigious, and his latest, *Boxing Gym*, is similarly concerned with hard graft—the discipline, stamina, and tenacity required to do any job well. Screening in Director's Fortnight, the film focuses on a boxing gym in Austin, Texas, a defiantly old-fashioned venue run by ex-professional boxer Richard Long. The customers of the gym have a broader range of abilities and come from a wider cross-section of society than the elite athletes of Wiseman's previous documentary, *La Danse*, about the Ballet de l'Opéra National de Paris, but *Boxing Gym* is just as much a celebration of the body in movement. Adding a percussive sound mix of exhausted panting and shuffling feet, Wiseman creates a wonderfully impressionistic, sometimes near-abstract record of physical exertion that has the rhythm and musicality of choreographed dance. At only ninety minutes, it's one of Wiseman's shortest films, and perhaps a minor work, but fresh and delightful nonetheless.

For me, the standout film was another documentary: Andrei Ujicā's *Autobiography of Nikolae Ceauşescu*, which screened outside of competition. This engrossing portrait of the former Romanian president was assembled largely from the official films covering his rule. On one level this is an expertly assembled work of historical record: without voice-over or explanatory intertitles, the film features superbly selected archive footage, in rough chronological order, that brilliantly evokes the Ceauşescu era: from the uniform acclaim the president could count on during absurdly sycophantic party conventions of the 1960s and 70s to the desperate visits to desultory state supermarkets in the final days of his regime.

There is impressive formal rigor and self-reflexive complexity to Ujicā's project. Over the course of its three-hour running time, the documentary persuasively suggests that Ceauşescu's identification with the nation was so complete that the propaganda footage commissioned under his watch functioned almost as a vehicle of self-expression (hence the film's provocative "autobiographical" provenance, advertised

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Oliveira, Puiu . . . and Ceauşescu

Top left: *The Strange Case of Angelica*. Top right: *Aurora*. Bottom: *The Autobiography of Nikolae Ceauşescu*. Courtesy of Cannes Film Festival.

in the title). Needless to say, the many excerpts from state broadcasts glorifying Ceauşescu's achievements now carry quite different meanings. An obvious example are the sequences of the May Day rallies that the president inaugurates, perhaps inspired (or so the film suggests) by the stadium-sized kitsch of North Korean mass spectacles and the Ruritanian make-believe of a royal banquet at Buckingham Palace. What once were carnivals of state power become, in the context of the other material gathered here and the passage of time, symptomatic of Ceauşescu's delusional grandiosity, increasingly at odds with the grim realities of ordinary Romanian life occasionally glimpsed elsewhere in the film.

The footage is frequently spectacular. Many sequences play with notions of scale, most hilariously when we see the diminutive Ceauşescu resorting to very unsporting behaviour during a game of volleyball with much taller players. At one point, the president looms over an architectural model of his latest palace and then moments later we see him dwarfed by the sprawling complex as it's being built, a vast site stretching far into the grey Bucharest mist. But there's also a fascinating attention to the small, human side of the statesman. In regular sequences of near silence—we hear only what sounds like the click of the projector—Ceauşescu is revealed during more unguarded moments in the company of figures like Nixon, Brezhnev, and Queen Elizabeth II. The effect is of a home-movie immediacy or diary-like intimacy—vulnerability, even. Among the many achievements of this major work is that, while we never lose sight of the monstrous self-regard of the Romanian dictator, he emerges as a figure of some poignancy.

The festival's other three-hour Romanian film, *Aurora*, made similarly intricate demands on our compassion toward its deeply unsympathetic character. The long-awaited follow-up to Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mister Lazarescu*, *Aurora* features the director himself as Viorel, a divorced, middle-aged factory supervisor. In almost every scene, he is a scowling, taciturn, sluggish figure nursing a grudge against the world. The specific nature of the grudge slowly emerges during the film. (To reveal the cause, and the effect, of Viorel's embittered grievances would ruin the unfurling psychological richness of this absorbing character study and the grisly punchline of its final scene.) Similar to *The Death of Mister Lazarescu* in its long-take realism—whose fluid naturalism disguises a virtuoso command of pace and camerawork—the film departs from its predecessor's view of the

Romanian health service's institutional breakdown in favor of depicting personal turmoil and disintegration. Remarkably played by Puiu, Viorel is first seen, naked, as his lover sleeps beside him on the bed—yet he only gets more exposed as *Aurora* progresses in its raw account of his paranoid, violently insecure masculinity. This is a remarkable film and I hope that its distributors will resist the temptation to shorten its running time.

After the exacting stringency of *Aurora*, I was happy to surrender to *Carancho*, a tense, soulful urban thriller from Argentine director Pablo Trapero that was by far the most straightforwardly gripping film I saw at Cannes. Ricardo Darín is ambulance-chasing lawyer Sosa who launches compensation claims on behalf of Buenos Aires poor, injured in traffic accidents; Martina Gusman is Luján, a doctor who provides emergency treatment to many of Sosa's potential clients. The two meet, fall in love, and hatch a scheme to bring justice to a vulnerable family exploited by Sosa's firm. This is intelligent, character-driven entertainment of the first order, whose social realist concern for an underclass that can't afford health cover is married to a thriller of pacey and fluid assurance. It handsomely delivers on the promise of the other Trapero films I've seen, *The Lion's Den* and *Born and Bred*.

Just as entertaining—although a little more scrappy—was Greg Araki's *Kaboom*. A gleefully improbable tale of a young bisexual student living in a candy-colored Californian campus who finds himself the centre of a new age cult's machinations, *Kaboom* combines swoony teen drama, witty dialogue, Lynchian weirdness, and breezily polysexual shenanigans: which is to say it's vintage Araki. I enjoyed the mix immensely. The acting is fresh (and seriously sexy), and the humor sharp and knowing. There were a few walkouts at the screening I attended, but perhaps these spectators had just remembered where they left their sense of irony.

Socialism
Courtesy of Cannes Film Festival.

If the directors I've mentioned so far are all familiar names, then that's because this wasn't much of a year for discovering new talent. Of the debut features I saw, Vietnamese director Dang Di Phan's *Bi, Don't Be Afraid* was the strongest. A portrait of a middle-class family in present-day Hanoi, the movie features minimal dialogue, but it evokes the relationships, tensions, and desires that charge the home atmosphere with an elliptical narrative, delicately imagistic direction, and subtle, honest performances. The impressionistic storytelling requires patience—this is not a film to make grand claims about—but it's a work of shifting surprises and quiet beauty.

Shown alongside *Bi, Don't Be Afraid* in Critics' Week, *Armadillo*, a sophomore effort, was clearly the work of a highly talented filmmaker. Janus Metz Pedersen's accomplished documentary follows a group of Danish Army recruits, stationed in a heavily fortified camp in Helmand Province in Afghanistan. Observational in style, its close-quarters view of the young, often inexperienced soldiers is immediate and moving. The person I saw the film with found its portrayal of the military troublingly sympathetic, but *Armadillo* seemed to me keenly sensitive to the complexities of the conflict. Pedersen is careful, for instance, to give voice to the civilians caught in the crossfire between the coalition troops and Taliban. The centerpiece is a terrifyingly vivid battle between the Danes and a few Taliban fighters (which later became the subject of a media storm back in Denmark). Not only is this an extraordinarily disturbing example of war reporting, the sequence has a provocative ambiguity, depicting the firefight in such a way that both confirms and contradicts the testimony that the soldiers later give of the battle.

In a year when new talent was hard to find it was perhaps fitting that the most memorable film I saw should have been by an octogenarian director whose history with Cannes is long and formative. Not that Jean-Luc Godard was cowed by tradition or convention in presenting his *Socialism* in Un Certain Regard; he didn't turn up for the screening or the press conference. And—as if to mock the festival's insistence on world premieres—he posted a speeded-up version of *Socialism* in its entirety online in advance. This is a film that needs more than one viewing, so I'll just say that it's one of the most striking uses of HD photography I've seen and it replaces the elegiac tone of the director's last few films with a more vital sardonic wit. If the film had been directed by a twentysomething newcomer, we'd all be hailing it as the future of cinema.

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AN AMOROUS CATFISH

Last year at Cannes we watched masterpiece after masterpiece, but this year (May 12–23) the films were nowhere near as good. Even Ken Loach, who can usually be relied upon, turned in a terrible dud with *Route Irish*, a film about mercenaries in Iraq with a convoluted and implausible plot and the unsurprising message that mercenaries are both brutal and brutalized. In the cafes and bars, the dinners and the parties, there was much talk of the death of cinema. Actually the death of cinema has been a staple topic of conversation among film folk since the advent of sound but somehow there was a deathly chill in the air as though the films that Cannes depends on that blend art and money, originality and star power, may in fact be passing from the screens.

Such thoughts were stimulated by the fact that one highlight this year was a special presentation of Visconti's *The Leopard*. I'm not Visconti's greatest fan. The word operatic is well applied to him and a screening of *Senso* in Lyon last year left me impressed but cold, but *The Leopard* is different. The astonishing beauty of Alain Delon and Claudia Cardinale; the startling performance of Burt Lancaster as the prince; above all the cinematography and the decor that climax in the final ball scene—all these add up to one of the greatest of films as a historical era and a man's life wane in concert. The sense of time's passing was unmistakable because Delon and Cardinale, forty-seven years older and the last survivors of the cast and crew, were there to introduce the film, Delon still startlingly beautiful as he nears eighty, Cardinale as full of giggles as a young girl.

What *The Leopard* had which most of this year's films lack is a great script—not simply the powerful narrative of Lampedusa's novel but the great adaptation for the screen by Suso Cecchi d'Amici. From the abysmal *Robin Hood*, which opened the festival, onward, accomplished displays of acting and cinematography were wasted on hackneyed scripts. Even Paul Laverty, who has turned in great Loach scripts for over a decade, allowed his take on Iraq to be overwhelmed by the fatal trope of the stolen recorded sound or image that will reveal all. It is true that Antonioni in *Blowup* and Coppola in *The Conversation* used this trope brilliantly, but the storytelling in *Route Irish* offers nothing that even approaches these films. It also features what must be a first in the Loach canon, a truly weak central performance. Mark Womack, as ex-mercenary Fergus seeking the truth about his best friend's death, is reduced to a one-note shout.

Loach's rare failure is not going to harm the reputation he has built over five decades, but I doubt if the same can be said in the case of Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Biutiful*, which was so disappointing that it prompted the thought that in the much-publicized bust-up with regular scriptwriter Guillermo Arriaga, it is Iñárritu who is the loser. Even Javier Bardem's splendid performance as the central character Uxbal, which was rewarded with one of the Best Actor prizes, cannot redeem a ludicrously overloaded plot and an insufferably self-satisfied tone. Iñárritu's three earlier films all cover a huge amount of territory but they involve multiple characters and locations. Making one character bear the weight of imminent death from cancer, a bipolar wife, and responsibility for both Chinese and African illegal immigration becomes simply ridiculous. The fact that Uxbal's exact economic role in the exploitation of the illegal immigrants he befriends is never actually made clear is typical of a film which is so narcissistically self-satisfied with its own social conscience that it is incapable of real social engagement.

Another film that scored high marks for pretentiousness but low marks for insight was Abbas Kiarostami's *Certified Copy*. The Iranian master seems to have been reading a lot of out-of-date European theory and much of the dialogue is taken up with well-rehearsed riffs on the relation between original and copy. If this wasn't bad enough, his account of a mature woman meeting a visiting lecturer (or is it in fact not an original meeting but yet another copy in an overlong relationship?) stars Juliette Binoche in her most irritating vein, never using one simper when three will do. The jury's decision to award her the Best Actress award was incomprehensible to this reviewer.

Jean-Luc Godard has perhaps been the filmmaker who has tussled longest and hardest in both theory and practice to rethink cinematic narrative. His dictum that every film must have a beginning, a middle, and an end—but not necessarily in that order—is well known. Even better in my opinion is the scene in *Passion* where the director, hounded by Italian financiers, turns and exclaims that he does understand how important a script is to them and the minute the film is finished his first action will be to have a transcript made and

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Of Gods and Men
Courtesy of Cannes Film Festival.

sent round. In fact Godard has all but abandoned narrative since *Hail Mary* twenty-five years ago, but his contribution to Cannes this year, *Socialism*, took the deconstruction of story to a new level.

The film is in three parts. In the first a cruise ship wanders around the Mediterranean adrift on a sea of history that the passengers have ceased to understand; these tourists have forgotten the struggles and conflicts that make up the history of the Mediterranean although those struggles and conflicts still have their effects in the present. The second section takes us to one of those Swiss gas stations that have been so central to Godard's films since *Passion*. Here two children and a llama interrogate the Western political tradition. Finally the third section takes us to six historical stopping-off points around the Mediterranean: Egypt, Palestine, Odessa, Hellas, Naples, and Barcelona. As with all Godard's films, *Socialism* teems both with ideas and unforgettable images. In addition Godard has invented a new trick—the English subtitles are written in a kind of pidgin (Godard calls it "American Navajo") that actually provides a counterpoint to the French rather than a translation. This is intriguing enough, but the old man is now completely unforgiving to any pleasure. At any moment when an image might become a story or a thought an argument he cuts—this must be the most castrating film of all time. The final shot is of a card that simply says NO COMMENT: difficult to improve on that as a summary of Godard's intransigence.

One of the more pleasing aspects of Godard's career since 1968 has been his willingness to help young filmmakers such as Xavier Beauvois, whose 1992 debut *Nord* was so impressive. This year Beauvois provided one of the few films, *Of Gods and Men*, where the beauty of the cinematography (Caroline Champetier) and the brilliant ensemble cast were matched by an excellent script (written by Beauvois himself) which eschewed easy narrative thrills or smug soul-searching. The film is set in a Cistercian priory in Algeria in the mid-1990s as the full-scale civil war between Islamist rebels and the government becomes ever more savage. The insurgents warn the monks that they must leave; the neighboring villagers beg them to stay. The situation, based on a true story, provides all the narrative menace that one could want—for the monks are facing imminent violent death. The suspense created by this situation is offset by, on the one hand, scenes of the monks as they sing their prayers and go about their daily tasks and, on the other, a series of community debates about what to do. Some will find the film slow but the precision of word and image is gripping and the final denouement as the monks make their decision and then celebrate with a feast is deeply moving. *Of Gods and Men* deservedly won the Grand Prix.

If it can seem that art cinema is dying in the multiplexes, it is nevertheless finding new life in galleries and museums where the moving image has become more and more dominant. It was thus fitting that the winner of this year's Palme d'Or, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Previous Lives*, was conceived as part of a larger installation. The opening shots are of a water buffalo slipping its halter to wander into a forest from which its owner then retrieves it. The beauty of the images is immediately overwhelming as one enters into a world where the distinctions between animal and human, living and dead begin to lose their significance. Uncle Boonmee has come to the country to die and among those who gather to witness his passing are his dead wife and a son who has become a spectacularly hairy monkey. No description of the film can sound anything but ludicrous (particularly an unbelievably touching scene when a catfish and a princess make love), but watching it is not a ludicrous but an uplifting process.

It is tempting to say that Apichatpong (aka Joe) has abandoned story for a lyricism that simply celebrates the beauty of the world. But so to do is to ignore the fact that he has a very secure end, in fact our model of all narrative endings, in Uncle Boonmee's fast-approaching death. With such an end almost all the rest of the film becomes middle—from the buffalo that we might conjecture is one of Boonmee's previous lives to the discussion of the politics of Thailand's North East region. It was in this region that Apichatpong grew up and protests initiated there provided much of the impetus for the Red Shirts movement that brought Bangkok to a standstill as the film was screened at Cannes. *Uncle Boonmee* also had, at

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Previous Lives
Courtesy of Cannes Film Festival.

least on this viewer's interpretation, a beginning, for the ecstatic coupling of princess and catfish might well be the origin of Boonmee's multiple existences.

Many were surprised by the jury's choice of such an avant-garde film for the Palme d'Or. It is arguably the most avant-garde film ever to have won Cannes but it was certainly a great choice in a poor year. It must also be remembered that the president of the jury this year was Tim Burton whose much underrated *Big Fish* shares many themes with the Thai film. Indeed it would be interesting to know if Apichatpong had seen Burton's film.

But it will be even more interesting to see how *Uncle Boonmee* fares when it is released. Any hard-nosed calculator of percentages and profits would instantly dismiss any chance of it making an impact at the box office. However the film is so beautiful and haunting, and Apichatpong has acquired such a brilliant reputation in little over a decade, that maybe this will be the film that breaks through.

Anyone who wants to know more about this forty-year-old director should consult James Quandt's magnificent book on the director published in the Austrian Film Museum's SYNEMA series in 2009. Quandt has gathered together a stellar set of articles and added a full filmography, bibliography, and other invaluable information. Perhaps the single most illuminating article is Tony Rayns's contribution that links Apichatpong's films both to a childhood spent in a hospital as the son of two doctors and to Buddhism. The director is not explicitly religious but he is clearly sensitive to Thai Buddhist culture. Rayns points particularly to the concept of *sunnata* and its twentieth-century interpretation in Buddhadasa Bhikku's *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree: The Buddha's Teaching on Voidness*. For Rayns, Apichatpong's films attempt a spiritual healing in which both director and viewer become empty of self. Whether Apichatpong can heal the cinema as well we shall see.

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PROTEAN ADVENTURES

Bologna's Il Cinema Ritrovato (Cinema Rediscovered) festival screens lost films recently found, degraded films newly restored, and forgotten films now remembered. In this, my third year in attendance, the festival showed 313 films over eight days and nights (June 26–July 3). With so much on offer, it is necessary to make choices; I spent most of my days immersed in the silents.

100 Years Ago is one of the festival's most consistently fascinating and surprising programs. Most film series, film courses, and film books are organized around particular themes, people, or countries. When investigating films of the past, it's easy to forget what is obvious about film reception today—that all kinds of films play alongside and rub up against each other; *Eclipse*, for example, might play down the street from *A Prophet*. Unlike traditional approaches, organizing a series around a single year allows you to see the diversity of practices across genres, studios, and nations and also how a particular zeitgeist appeared in multiple places at the same time. This year's spotlight on European film of 1910 illustrated the increasing integration of plot and landscape, and the rise of the comedian-centered film series and "name" directors and actors. As in past years, several films featured men dressed as women. Although the big feet of one cross-dressed man frighten away his male admirer, in another film a lascivious postman is unbothered by the ungainly dimensions of his object, a female cook played by a man. After giving in to his initial advances, s/he only manages to quench his lust with a bucket of water. Gender disguise threatens to undermine the bourgeois home in *The Nanny's Trunk* (*Le Malle de la nourrice*, director unknown, 1910), in which a male thief disguised as a nanny takes a job only in order to unleash his cross-dressed, safe-cracking conspirator from a trunk. In order to escape, they pull Meliès-style tricks—stuffing numerous pursuers into a single trunk and later removing paper-thin versions of these people, who are then restored to depth by a passing breeze—that play with cinema's pretense of three-dimensionality. Many of the films in the program were restored in the past six months by the Cineteca di Bologna.

The series *Peerless and Fearless: Adventurous Women of the Silent Screen*, demonstrated the way that film heroines—from outlaws to acrobats to doctors—offered new models of femininity to filmgoers. Films starring daredevil American serial queens like Pearl White, Ruth Roland, Helen Holmes, and Grace Cunard were interspersed with lesser-known European performers like French music hall star Mistinguett, Italian acrobat–comedian Lea Giunchi, and Italian strongwoman Astrea.

The biggest revelation for me was *Protéa* (Victorin Jasset, 1913), starring Josette Andriot. The first remarkable title card condenses the pleasures in store for the audience. "Protéa" appears in broad brush strokes diagonally across the frame beside an image of actress Andriot. The image dissolves into a drawing of a black domino mask, which then dissolves into successive images of Andriot in various disguises—as a dark-eyed vamp, an innocent in white, an exotic in a golden bodice holding a riding crop, and even a male solider. This title card then disappears as a man in a body suit crawls into the frame—whom we later learn is L'Anguille (The Eel, played by Lucien Bataille), Protéa's sidekick—and he changes, in a succession of cuts, into a policeman, a general, and then, most improbably, an ape.

The minister of an invented country calls on Protéa—"a mysterious being, a genius of espionage"—to steal a document from a rival country, and she agrees. The film borrows conventions of the stage's quick-change artist to portray the characters' metamorphoses: they pin up a scarf across a train compartment before Protéa frantically tosses off the black tailor-made suit of a staid governess in favor of a black-and-white-striped party dress. Later, Protéa and L'Anguille jump into two closet-sized changing rooms and the doors partially dissolve so that we can see the spies frantically tear off their clothing for a few seconds before the doors rematerialize. In a few moments, the two creep out of the rooms in black bodysuits. The film is a giddy combination of magic show and action movie, more closely aligned to the exuberance of American serials than Louis Feuillade's darker variants that soon followed. Though *Protéa*'s director, Jasset, died before the film was released, Andriot played Protéa in four more films, all lost (for now!).

In the festival's most substantial series, *Early John Ford*, female adventurers gave way to the portrayals of women as sweethearts, wives, and mothers, with only an occasional cowgirl. Given the proliferation of Ford retrospectives in recent years and the significant *Ford at Fox* DVD boxed set, why another series devoted to Ford? "Sometimes less is the

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Metropolis playing in Piazza Maggiore
Courtesy of Il Cinema Ritrovato.

point," argues festival director Peter von Bagh; "we are convinced that Ford's silent output is a universe in its own right." Indeed, the films do generate at least a separate galaxy from Ford's more celebrated works; these films are often interesting for the way the parts don't quite fit together, unlike Ford's later, more tightly controlled works.

The series showcased nineteen of Ford's silent films (complete or in fragments), two transition-era films with recorded score and sound effects, and eight eclectic early talkies. (The only extant silents not included were *Upstream* [1927] and the trailer for *Strong Boy* [1929], both discovered this year in a New Zealand archive.) Writer Joseph McBride, who presided over the Frank Capra series last year, introduced the films and pointed out the auteurist signatures already present in the director's earliest work—his fascination with the "good bad man" and his visual representation of doorways to communicate the tension between inside and outside, civilization and nature.

An unmistakable element in Ford's early films is the striking composition of the frame. In the surviving fragment of *The Secret Man* (1917), made when the director was only twenty-three, the frame is cut diagonally by a steep hill and silhouettes of three men on horseback against a white sky. Silhouettes of men and landscapes appear throughout the films, as well as expressionistic shafts of sunlight, prison bars, and glowing matches—years before the *Sunrise*-inspired film *Four Sons* (1928). The climactic attack on the family homestead in *Straight Shooting* (1917) draws from the innovative cross-cutting of Griffith's *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch* (1913), famously reprised in *The Birth of a Nation* (1914).

Many of Ford's early films are preoccupied with the aggression, intimacy, pleasure, and vulnerability that characterize relationships among men in these territories where eastern rules of sociality don't apply. In *Hell Bent* (1918), a bed shortage prompts Cheyenne Harry (Harry Carey) to shove the notorious Cimmaron Bill (Duke Lee) out of the one remaining bed. The two men battle it out until they overhear someone singing "Sweet Genevieve" and the two drunken men put arms around each other and take up the chorus. The next morning they come down the stairs arm in arm, best friends. Throughout the film, the song continues to bring them together—in harmony, if not always in bed. Though Harry eventually ends up with the girl, the final shot finds all three walking over a bridge: first the girl, then Harry, then Bill.

The Blue Eagle (1926) is ostensibly a love triangle, yet Ford spends more time working through the relationship between two navy men (George O'Brien and William Russell) than with the female lead (Janet Gaynor). It is the reconciliation of the *men's* relationship—not the formation of heterosexual couples—that allows the film to come to a close. In *The Black Watch* (1929), a bright-eyed young lieutenant Malcom (David Rollins) is far more compelling to hero

"You been a good pardner"
3 Bad Men (John Ford, 1926). DVD: 20th Century Fox.

Victor McLaglen than the vamping Indian prophet Yasmina (Myrna Loy).

In *3 Bad Men* (1926)—projected in the Piazza Maggiore accompanied by a full orchestra playing Timothy Brock's original, Copeland-inspired score—even the presence of a plucky cowgirl can't break up the male threesome. When Bull Stanley (Tom Santschi) sees Lee (Olive Borden) cooing over a baby, he instructs his companions, Mike and Spade (J. Farrell MacDonald and Frank Campeau), to pick out a man for her. They go "husband hunting," and inspect the possibilities in a local bar, examining the haunches and the teeth of a nervous dandy like horse traders. Thinking themselves open-minded, they conclude: "If a man's heart is in the right place, it don't matter what sex he belongs to."

The film's most touching moments come when each "bad man" bids goodbye to the other, each volunteering in turn to be the rear guard. "You been a good pardner," says Spade to Mike, his lip trembling. Though Lee gets her husband and, eventually, a house full of children, the film's last haunting shot is the silhouette of the spirits of the three "bad" men riding into the sunset together.

Incidentally, several of these films—in particular, *The Blue Eagle* and *The Iron Horse* (1924), both starring the beefy George O'Brien—feature more than their share of glistening, barechested men, boxing, wrestling, and shoveling coal. This often-forgotten component of the Western reaches its apotheosis in *Picnic* (1955), shown at the festival as part of the *Searching for Color in Films* series. The catalyst that undoes a delicate small-town ecosystem is the bronzed, oiled chest of William Holden. It appears even before the opening credits are over, quickly drawing the hungry gazes of pretty girl Kim Novak and cynical schoolteacher Rosalind Russell.

For a festival devoted to preserving film and showing the best prints available, I was disappointed that several films were projected digitally, including *My Cousin* (Edward José, 1918), starring Enrico Caruso; *Up the River* (John Ford, 1930); *Youth Runs Wild* (Mark Robson, 1944); and, most controversially, the evening program of Lumière actualities. Though a lot of detail was visible in the Lumières, I had the disconcerting feeling that I was watching a DVD. The sharp, flat images felt a bit uncanny; this impression was only compounded in the program's final moments, when they played through the entire program in reverse in a single minute and the images broke up into digital scan lines. There is a certain discomforting irony when the films made by the inventors of the medium cannot be shown *on film* at a festival devoted to film preservation.

My second quibble is with the program notes. The color plates added to the program book this year are beauties, yet many of the notes accompanying each film are excerpted directly from existing sources—the results often haphazard and less informative than they could be. The festival might consider crafting original notes that elucidate the films' historical and aesthetic context in light of new scholarship.

Overall, the festival this year did not have as many standout individual films as in previous years, but the moments of pleasurable excess sprinkled throughout in the *100 Years Ago*, *Peerless and Fearless*, and *Early John Ford* series made for satisfying viewing. After three years of organizing the main series around male auteurs, though, I'm ready for the festival to let one or two more adventurous women into the spotlight.

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CONTEMPORARY FILM DIRECTORS

DAVID STERRITT

Academics have been attacking auteurism since the 1960s, when it traveled from the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma* to publications, classrooms, and scholarly discourse everywhere. Polemicists like Andrew Sarris (zealously pro) and Pauline Kael (belligerently con) had heated debates about the theory, and eventually some of its inventors started easing back the throttle, as when Jean-Luc Godard admitted they had oversimplified the director's primacy in the hugely collaborative enterprise of feature filmmaking. Yet the *politique des auteurs* remains alive and well, and if anyone doubts that, they should look at current book series on the market. At this writing University Press of Mississippi has published six dozen volumes in its Conversations with Filmmakers line; the BFI World Directors series lists ten; Wallflower Press has published two dozen Directors' Cuts books; and Contemporary Film Directors, the University of Illinois Press series I focus on here, has produced a similar number.

So whether you admire the organizational clarity of auteurism or disdain its romantic notions of creative autonomy, the time has vanished when you could ignore its influence. Which is fine with me. As an academic and a critic, I've long agreed with Sarris's observation (in his 1968 essay "Toward a Theory of Film History") that directors are "capable now and then of a sublimity of expression almost miraculously extracted from [their] money-oriented environment." It does seem miraculous, but it happens often enough to keep my faith in cinema plugging along.

Like the other series I've mentioned, Contemporary Film Directors takes for granted the legitimacy of its auteur-centered approach. No explanations, justifications, or disclaimers appear in its blurbs. Each medium-sized volume contains an interview or two with the director as well as a filmography and bibliography. In terms of international scope, gender balance, and boldness of subject matter the series is mostly middle of the road, reflecting choices made by general editor James Naremore, or the inclinations of the writers who have contributed so far, or both. By way of comparison, note that the filmmakers covered by BFI World Directors include Shyam Benegal and Yash Chopra of India and Youssef Chahine of Egypt, none of them famous names outside cinephile circles, while Directors' Cuts includes Jan Svankmajer and Robert Lepage, who have solid avant-garde credentials. Naremore's series gets as far as Wong Kar-wai, Abbas Kiarostami, and Nelson Pereira dos Santos in geographical reach and as far as Chris Marker, Abel Ferrara, and Claire Denis in stylistic derring-do. These and other, more predictable choices constitute an impressive roster but hardly a trailblazing one. The list will continue to grow, however, and its content may become more varied and adventurous.

I've read quite a few of the Contemporary Film Directors books, and for purposes of an overall assessment I've chosen five representative volumes to comment on. *Jerry Lewis* (2009), by Chris Fujiwara, is one of the most recent arrivals, dealing with a challenging and controversial director. Also very recent is *Atom Egoyan* (2009), by Emma Wilson, who focuses on a filmmaker still in his prime. *Paul Schrader* (2008), by George Kouvaros, takes on a director whose long, diverse filmography has ups and downs galore. *Manoel de Oliveira* (2007), by Randal Johnson, looks at a towering auteur who's received much less in-depth attention than he deserves. The same goes for *Abbas Kiarostami* (2003), by

BOOK DATA

Abbas Kiarostami by Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum. 2003. 168 pages.
Atom Egoyan by Emma Wilson. 2009. 184 pages.
Jerry Lewis by Chris Fujiwara. 2009. 176 pages.
Manoel de Oliveira by Randal Johnson. 2007. 216 pages.
Paul Schrader by George Kouvaros. 2008. 184 pages.

All published in Urbana by University of Illinois Press. $65.00 cloth; $19.95 paper each.

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Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa and Jonathan Rosenbaum, one of the series' first books. If you see gaps in my sampling, blame it on the product line; thus far only three volumes on women (Denis, Jane Campion, Sally Potter) and two on Asian filmmakers (Wong, Edward Yang) have appeared, and I've decided to concentrate on characteristic selections rather than exceptions.

Jerry Lewis has been sparking debate since the 1960s, when various *Cahiers* and *Positif* critics designated him an ingenious auteur (an idea shared by many French moviegoers) and various American critics expressed bewilderment at the idea of discussing him at all. I've always found him more interesting as a metteur-en-scène than as a comedian, and I enjoy recalling Godard's appearance on *The Dick Cavett Show* in 1980, when a query about Lewis got him to put his impish obliquity on hold and articulately defend Lewis as a great cinematic stylist.

Chris Fujiwara, a gifted critic and lifelong Lewis aficionado, makes a robust argument in Lewis's favor without overlooking the fact that some pictures work better than others, if only because studios often cramped his inventiveness. By radically reducing the importance of story and verisimilitude, Fujiwara contends, Lewis created a paratactic cinema (my term) whose structural logic is internal to each individual film. The emblematic Lewis character is "not merely inconsistent, he is discontinuous," built upon "separate blocks of identity" (19–20) that are coextensive with segments of the movie he's in. Since every block operates according to its own (il)logic, its workings reveal the incipient chaos that lurks within sociocultural order, thereby challenging "the order of orders, the regime of the order" itself (58).

If anything ultimately ties these blocks together, it's the presence of Lewis's movie-star persona, but even this is contradicted (in his Frank Tashlin films as well as his own) by the "infinite receptive capacity" of his typical character, who "always takes into himself, acts out, and extends the possibilities he encounters in other people" (28). This often involves self-reflexive gestures—saying "ooh, I'm scared" when he's scared, for instance—that situate events "in the reality of bodies and in the quasi-reality of things reported" while presenting the body itself as "wavering between these two spheres, proposing processes of thought, feeling, and sensation as purely optional aspects of experience and identity" (37). Fujiwara doesn't mention Jacques Derrida or Michel Foucault, but their deconstructive spirits (and Bertolt Brecht's as well) clearly preside over passages like these.

Now let's get to the question that's been nagging you and me for the last couple of paragraphs: what's *funny* about all this? Fujiwara acknowledges that laughs are scarce in stretches of some Lewis movies—*The Family Jewels* (1965) and *Hardly Working* (1980), for example—but contends that the mercurial tone and generic discontinuity of the films create "an impure, shifting context within which such a lack need not be accounted a flaw" (51). In the same breath he defends Lewis's moments of dramatic pathos, finding "sentiment and seriousness" where many viewers (sometimes including me) find moralizing and mawkishness. Films like *The Ladies Man* (1961) and *The Big Mouth* (1967) get away with such material, Fujiwara says, by harboring "a deep uncertainty that always stands ready to undermine what seems to be their own most firmly held values and basic imperatives" via an impulse toward parody and an ambiguity that is "ever-present . . . at least as a threat" (45).

A careful reading of Fujiwara's whole argument is needed to evaluate these claims, and having made such a reading, I'm only half convinced by this part of it. Lewis's speechifying about the value of being nice, the need to be yourself, and so on has rubbed me the wrong way ever since I was a kid and saw *The Bellboy* (1960), where the brief dignity-of-the-little-guy statement near the end struck me as the kind of responsible-adult propaganda that movies shouldn't have and Jerry Lewis movies *really* shouldn't have. And I don't detect parody or ambiguity when Lewis remarks in Fujiwara's interview with him, "If you can be an influence on young people with something that's meaningful, I believe in it . . . I'm kind of idealistic, mid-Victorian, completely old-fashioned. I can't help that" (108).

Speaking more broadly about the book, its analytical seriousness is a terrific strength and also something of a weakness, insofar as its critical tone and some of its conclusions are abstract and fastidious enough to seem semidetached from the movies under discussion. (Terms like "Lewisian" and Tashlinian" have an awfully heavy ring.) Fujiwara's analysis of the films' counter-comic elements (repetitiveness, elision of punch lines and payoffs, and the like) is the best I've seen, making me want more than he has space for here. I also wish there were more discussion of how Lewis's films relate to the cultural and political contexts in which they were produced—e.g., his character's reference to World War II as a "war to end all wars" in *Which Way to the Front?* has a bitingly sarcastic ring for a film of 1970, when the Vietnam conflict was raging furiously—and of the drastic psychological dislocations that make *The Bellboy* an authentically avant-garde film. My reservations

are relatively minor, however. *Jerry Lewis* is a thoughtful, sharp-eyed study that offers valuable new perspectives on Lewis's ever-intriguing career.

Abbas Kiarostami was written by two Chicago-based critics: Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, an Iranian American filmmaker and professor, and Jonathan Rosenbaum, an esteemed commentator on international film. The book comprises independently written essays—first Rosenbaum's, then Saeed-Vafa's somewhat shorter piece—followed by a dialogue between them about their conclusions, two joint interviews with Kiarostami, a string of faxes among the three of them, and a statement by Kiarostami about his film *10* taken from its 2002 press book at the Cannes festival. These ingredients add up to an unconventionally structured volume that makes up in complementary viewpoints what it loses in linear development.

Jerry Lewis has been sparking debate since the 1960s, when various* Cahiers *and* Positif *critics designated him an ingenious auteur (an idea shared by many French moviegoers) and various American critics expressed bewilderment at the idea.

Rosenbaum's essay contains many keen observations, which isn't surprising, since he has engaged with Kiarostami's work as conscientiously as anyone I know. His comments on several early documentary shorts are especially valuable, given the paucity of English-language material about them. For one example out of many, Rosenbaum analyzes the use of recurring elements (particular shots, camera positions, editing patterns, story situations) in films like *So Can I* (1975) and *Orderly or Disorderly* (1981), identifying them as the building blocks that later evolved into such classic Kiarostami tropes as the repeated takes in *Through the Olive Trees* (1994) and the multiple uphill drives in *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999); he then notes that the parallel constructions he's describing (which I liken to the iterative models of some minimalist music) often seem more interrogative than declarative, which places Kiarostami among such filmmakers as John Cassavetes, Jacques Rivette, and Otto Preminger, for whom "a shot is often closer to being a question than an answer" (10–11). A little later Rosenbaum points out the zigzagging visual patterns—a pathway in *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987), the trajectories of a kicked spray can in *Close-Up* (1990), and a rolling apple in *The Wind Will Carry Us*—that serve as a visual signature for Kiarostami, who takes unpredictability and happenstance to be key factors in the shaping of human experience (34–5). This is first-rate criticism by any measure.

Saeed-Vafa looks more deeply into Kiarostami's roots in Iranian culture of the 1960s and 70s and into the role of cultural repression and self-censorship as spurs to creative ingenuity (61–2); the latter point is unoriginal in itself but has much resonance vis-à-vis Kiarostami, given his taste for elliptical storytelling and his cultivation of an "interactive cinema" in which (as Rosenbaum also discusses) moviegoers are encouraged to fill in narrative gaps with inferences and inventions of their own. Returning to the *Close-Up* spray-can scene, Saeed-Vafa gives a sensitive account of Kiarostami's decision to insert a seemingly irrelevant interlude just when he "should" be following a dramatic plot development that's happening a few feet away; her description put me in mind of W. H. Auden's often-quoted 1938 poem "Musée des Beaux Arts," which similarly places a momentous event into the background of life's ordinary routine. Moments like this are what made *Close-up*, as Saeed-Vafa accurately writes, "a film that changed the entire course of Iranian cinema" (55).

I strongly recommend this book for everyone who cares about Kiarostami and global film, but my praise is tempered by reservations about ill-considered remarks in the dialogue between the authors that follows the essays. At one point they go after Roger Ebert for disliking Kiarostami's masterly *Taste of Cherry* (1997), a tough-minded existential drama about a man (Homayoun Ershadi) planning to commit suicide, and in a trice they're wildly generalizing about "the films critics like [Ebert] tend to like . . . [which are] most often tearjerkers about pitiful little boys and poor helpless women" (95–96). That's a false and unfair claim. Then an unidentified "they" are chastised for sometimes calling Kiarostami an "intellectual" in order to "dismiss him" (96). Who are "they" and what are their motives? No details are provided. In these and other dubious remarks, reasoned judgment gives way to emotion and indignation. The authors also let Kiarostami get away with a problematic remark in one of their interviews with him, allowing to pass without comment his statement that Iranians he's talked with "who were illiterate and who didn't have much understanding of social life . . . require some kind of government or governing body to dictate to them what to do and how to live—because they're unable to decide for themselves what is right and wrong" (119). Kiarostami has

said nothing like that in any of my conversations with him, and if he had, I would certainly have challenged the anti-democratic assumptions he seems to express here. The dialogue and interview portions of *Abbas Kiarostami* make for lively reading, but they fall short of the lofty standard set by the critical essays.

Atom Egoyan, written by British film scholar Emma Wilson, set me thinking again about the question of authorial tone that I mentioned earlier. Wilson analyzes ten of Egoyan's movies, from *Next of Kin* (1984) to *Where the Truth Lies* (2005), diligently and intelligently. But approaching the halfway mark I began to feel that some aspect or quality of Egoyan's work was being missed, and the section on *Calendar* (1993) made me realize what it was. *Calendar* is among the most personal of Egoyan's invariably personal films. In a rare acting excursion, he himself plays the protagonist, a lonely photographer who has joyless conversations with paid escorts while moping in his Toronto apartment over the affair he imagines his wife (played by Egoyan's wife and star performer, Arsinée Khanjian) is having with the driver (Ashot Adamyan) who recently guided them through Armenia while he photographed rural churches for a calendar. The film deals with several of Egoyan's habitual themes, including the complexities of family life, the ubiquity of media in modern society, and his nostalgia for the Armenian culture, history, and ancestry that slipped away from him as the child of émigrés to Canada.

Every cinephile knows that Manoel de Oliveira is the world's oldest filmmaker—as I write he's almost 102 and still making a movie (or two) every year—but not all of them know he's one of the greatest.

These are weighty subjects, and Egoyan is serious about them. Yet one of the most conspicuous qualities of *Calendar* is that it's very, very funny—sometimes funny peculiar, oftentimes funny ha-ha, and marvelously wry throughout. You would hardly guess this from Wilson's analysis, which makes the movie sound about as amusing as *Taste of Cherry*. She is accurate when she writes that Egoyan here "pursues his concerns with misapprehension and misconnection coupled with intuition and unspoken, uncanny knowledge" (64). But he also pursues them with *humor*, and Wilson's failure to appreciate this undermines the thoroughness of her engagement.

Wilson's earnest analytical style is more appropriate when applied to films with a less ironic touch. She says much of interest about Egoyan's greatest picture, *The Sweet Hereafter* (1997); her explorations of *The Adjuster* (1991) and *Exotica* (1994) are frequently perceptive; and she makes a good case for *Ararat* (2002), sorting through historical concerns, structural layers, and cultural allusions in a film I find overambitious and unwieldy. The strength of her scholarship makes me hope all the more that she will give thought to matters of critical temperament, however. This includes paring away unnecessary references, as in the *Exotica* section, where she quotes bell hooks quoting Lawrence Chua quoting Egoyan in a single citation (79), creating a mise-en-abyme of needless clutter. Her quotations from Hamid Naficy, which tend toward triteness and ambiguity, could also have been chosen with more care, and she uses the word "televisual" so often that it seems like a tic. Most of all, Wilson needs to present her critical insights in ways that convey holistic involvement with all aspects of her subjects, up to and including the funny bits.

At the beginning of *Paul Schrader*, George Kouvaros summarizes the filmmaker's perplexing qualities with a quotation that reads in part, "I can never really make anything that's settled, because I just have always found that contradictory ideas exist quite well in my head" (1). This alone makes Schrader a challenging subject for concise critical treatment, and lots more must also be accounted for—his religious background, his activities as a film critic, changes in American cinema when he entered the industry in the late 1970s, the dialectical relationship of his commercial and experimental interests, and his unending fascination with obsession, criminality, psychosis, and sex. Kouvaros tackles all of this, commenting on every film from *Blue Collar* (1978) to *Dominion: Prequel to the Exorcist* (2005) and discussing such key issues as adaptation (e.g. Russell Banks and Ian McEwan), biography (e.g. his films on Patricia Hearst and Bob Crane), and design (e.g. the emphatic visuals of *American Gigolo* in 1980 and *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* in 1985). Remarkably, this transpires in less than 150 pages (excluding back matter) without ever seeming squeezed or hasty. Kudos to Kouvaros on this score.

Best of all, the study's interpretations and explications are informative, imaginative, and to the point, incorporating the extensive array of cultural references that effective Schrader criticism must deploy. A few examples will suffice. Kouvaros explains how Irena in *Cat People* (1982) is spiritu-

ally descended (as Schrader has noted) from Beatrice in Dante Alighieri's masterpiece of courtly love *La Vita Nuova* of 1295 (50–51); how *Mishima* and *Patty Hearst* (1988) are organized around the inseparable nature of identity and imitation, private life and public image (74); how "the self's capacity to be taken over and made not its own" (88) provides a psychological tipping point in many Schrader films; and how the intrusion of false events into personal experience is central to *Light Sleeper* (1992) and *Affliction* (1997). I'd prefer different emphases and inflections in some instances, and I wish Kouvaros brought in a few additional points about certain films—saying more about the extraordinary acting and intimate ambience of the underrated *Light Sleeper*, for example, and linking Schrader's probing examination of personality and performance in *Patty Hearst* and elsewhere with the profound explorations of this domain by John Cassavetes, about whom Kouvaros has written in the past. And how can one discuss *Hard Core* without mentioning the religious convictions that propel the protagonist (George C. Scott) through the story? But these are quibbles about a first-rate study that deserves a wide and attentive readership.

Every cinephile knows that Manoel de Oliveira is the world's oldest filmmaker—as I write he's almost 102 and still making a movie (or two) every year—but not all of them know he's one of the greatest. His directorial career has an odd configuration, with thirteen features and shorts between 1931 and 1975, then almost three times that number from the five-hour *Doomed Love* in 1979 to *The Strange Case of Angelica* in 2010. His finest achievements include *Abraham's Valley* (1993), a romantic saga; *The Convent* (1995), a sardonic mystery; and *A Talking Picture* (2003), a paradoxically delicate drama about civilization's decline and fall. I'm also very fond of *The Cannibals* (1988), an oneiric opera film, and *I'm Going Home* (2001), the bittersweet story of an aging actor. Portugal has a strong tradition of adventurous filmmaking, and Oliveira has been in its forefront for decades, also working in France and elsewhere on occasion.

All of which means that *Manoel de Oliveira*, the first English-language book on the director, is a needed and welcome contribution to the Contemporary Film Directors series. Its author is Randal Johnson, a scholar of Latin American literature with a firm grasp of Portuguese culture. His particular expertise in Luso-Brazilian literature is an especially good credential to have for comprehensive study of Oliveira, who makes productive use of *The Lusiads*, the Virgilian hymn to Portugal and its voyages of discovery published by Luis de Camões in 1572, in such historically based films as *No, or the Vain Glory of Command* (1990), *A Talking Picture*, and *The Fifth Empire* (2004). The most important of these is *No*, which signals Oliveira's skeptical stance toward colonialism, imperialism, and other nationalistic vainglories by reversing the *Lusiads* agenda, focusing not on Portuguese triumphs but rather on the defeats its ambitions have suffered over the centuries.

Johnson traces the evolution of Oliveira's stylistic signatures clearly and carefully, emphasizing the auteur's longtime exploration of liminal zones where cinema overlaps with other aesthetic forms. Oliveira probes these areas via such devices as literary dialogue, minimalist acting methods, theatrical mise-en-scène, direct address to the camera, self-reflexive practices of various kinds, autonomy of words, music, and imagery, and camerawork that's at once technically transparent and emotionally expressive. In my only formal interview with Oliveira, when *I'm Going Home* had its U.S. premiere in 2002, he explained his interest in conjoining film with other art forms in direct and plainspoken terms. "Cinema is the phantom of the moment," he told me, "not life itself . . . Cinema is always memory, just as literature and history are memory." Those words—literature, history, memory, cinema—encapsulate his artistry.

Oliveira's large and novel body of work is a lot for a relatively brief monograph to handle, and Johnson lapses into vagueness at times. He observes that the shifting temporality of *My Case* (1986) "allows for reflection" on the role of art and other issues (55), but he doesn't share any reflections that he might have had. Writing about paintings by Oliveira's son Manoel Casimiro, seen in *About the National Flag* (1987), he says they are instances of "painting of intervention" (62) without offering a clue as to what that label means. Describing the music at the beginning of *The Letter* (1999) only as "contemporary" won't be very helpful for those who haven't seen the film. I encourage Johnson to revisit Oliveira's cinema in a few years, bringing in films the auteur has completed since the delightful *Belle toujours* (2006)—two features and six shorts at last count!—and delving more deeply into his established masterpieces. But for now this volume, like most of the others in Contemporary Film Directors, will do very nicely indeed.

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DIGITAL TIME: RECENT WORK IN FILM THEORY

MARTIN FRADLEY

The essays collected in Laura Mulvey's *Visual and Other Pleasures* were not intended to stand the test of time. The writing was, as Mulvey herself explains in the new introduction, "essentially and necessarily ephemeral" and shaped by "the demands of polemic" (xxvii). First published in 1989, the background to *Visual and Other Pleasures* is the decline of 1970s Leftist optimism and the emergent neoliberal consensus of the Reagan–Thatcher era. The book's centerpiece, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," is quite poignant now, recalling as it does the confident rhetoric of the Women's Movement. And though the essay condemns Hollywood's objectification of women for the benefit of a "male gaze," the author's own cinephilia is clearly reflected in the essays on Sirk, Fassbinder, and Godard. The impact of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has been enormous, but in subsequent essays in the collection Mulvey argues that her groundbreaking polemic is more useful when supplemented by more historically minded methodologies. *Visual and Other Pleasures* also demonstrates Mulvey's advocacy of the cinematic avant-garde, in keeping with her famous statement that "the decline of the traditional film form" should not be viewed "with anything much more than sentimental regret" (27). An experimental filmmaker herself, Mulvey's theoretical vocabulary was realized in several works including *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1976), co-directed with Peter Wollen. Ever the iconoclast, Mulvey believed cinema could challenge and even help to overturn the dominant social order. A note of regret emerges in Mulvey's later writing. In this new edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Mulvey alludes to the melancholic sense of discontinuity she feels revisiting her early essays, citing her "realisation that the cinema's aging process parallels my personal aging, my personal identification with modernity's failed utopianism" (xxv).

If her overview of the material in *Visual and Other Pleasures* is underwritten by a sense of missed political opportunities, *Death 24x a Second* continues Mulvey's preoccupation with film's relationship to the passing of time. Beginning with the retrospectives surrounding cinema's centenary in 1995, Mulvey points out that these celebrations were doubly haunted by the specter of mortality. Cinema's embalming of time means that, by the end of the twentieth century, it increasingly functions as a mausoleum of moving images, preserving them as undead phantasms doomed to an eternal repetition. There is this further complication, however: despite its initial promise of virtual immortality, film itself has proven to be an unstable medium. The potential for chemical decay is an intimate part of celluloid's physicality and even the simple running of a reel of film through a projector involves the process of erosion and eventual oblivion.

For Mulvey, cinema is inherently uncanny. Its illusion of movement is derived solely from the flicker of still photographic images, and *Death 24x a Second* contends that the stillness of death is ever-present in cinema's moving images. The volume pivots upon this paradoxical dualism. The flow and forward drive of traditional narrative film serve to mask the basic secret of its ghostly stillness. But whereas mainstream cinema's "entrancing images moving on a screen in a darkened space" (67) seek to elide the material realities of celluloid being projected, avant-garde film exposes its own materiality and mechanical apparatus. Mulvey thus celebrates the interactive possibilities offered by DVD, which was first marketed in 1997, shortly after the centenary celebrations. Elsewhere, Douglas Gordon's art installation *24-Hour Psycho* (1993)—Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) slowed down to two frames per second and shown in a gallery space—prompts a meditation on film technology; the work highlights both the cinematic immediacy of film projected at twenty-four frames per second *and* the simultaneous "pastness" of each individual frame. The "cinema of delay" advocated by Mulvey here is one which resists the furious onward drive of narrative; a cinema of visual and semiotic depth which begs re-viewing and careful reconsideration. To delay the image, she argues, is to extract it from its narrative surroundings, a form of strategic fetishism allowing the image to "return to its context and to contribute something

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extra and unexpected, a deferred meaning, to the story's narration" (151).

Ostensibly a monograph, *Death 24x a Second* often reads like another disparate collection of essays. There is a lively consideration of Rossellini's *Voyage to Italy* (1953) and an excellent chapter on the formal and reflexive intelligence of Abbas Kiarostami's cinema. Yet here Mulvey's perennial fondness for Freudian concepts is perhaps overenthusiastic, begging the question of their relevance to Iranian culture. And while Mulvey's enthusiasm for the interactive possibilities of domestic DVD viewing is certainly infectious, there is a sense that this is in many ways yesterday's news. *Death 24x a Second* advocates the playfully disruptive forms of spectatorship permitted by rewind, pause, and slow-motion playback which, in Mulvey's view, enable "new modes of spectatorship" (27) far removed from the passive rapture of the traditional cinema experience. Yet not only have these functions been widely available for over three decades, Mulvey's argument is also remarkably similar to earlier debates surrounding the creative potential and "distracted" viewing pleasures encouraged by VCR technology in the 1980s. Indeed, the democratic possibilities enabled by the now-obsolete video recorder are evident in Henry Jenkins's well-known scholarly work on fan cultures as well as the nostalgia of popular films such as *Be Kind, Rewind* (2008). "Politically," Mulvey asserts in reintroducing *Visual and Other Pleasures*, "the delayed cinema resists a rush towards the new, to the future, and reaches back, figuratively, through the history of cinema to those surrounding histories that we cannot yet afford to abandon" (xxv). The desire to slow the passing of time, to return and reconsider the past, is at the heart of both these volumes, and it is as relevant to the history and lost political impetus of film theory as it is to the creeping death of cinema.

"The question is not whether cinema will die," D. N. Rodowick claims, "but rather just how long ago it ceased to be" (26). *The Virtual Life of Film* argues that the most productive response to the gradual erasure of cinema's photomechanical basis is a combination of mournful nostalgia and forward-looking optimism. If film is dead, alas; *long live cinema!* Noting that the question "what is cinema?" is one that insistently recurs during periods of rapid technological change, Rodowick makes an impassioned call to arms regarding the continued importance of cinema studies in the wake of the so-called digital divide. Suggesting that film theory "has fallen on hard times, even within the field of cinema studies itself" (3), the author offers a lucid and sophisticated retort to those who would consign all memory of the discipline to the cutting-room floor. For Rodowick, film theory remains "one of the most intellectually daring areas of intellectual inquiry of the last century" (24).

BOOK DATA

Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*. 2nd edn. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. $95.00 cloth. 272 pages.

——, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion, 2006. $24.95 paper. 216 pages.

David Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. $60.00 cloth; $26.00 paper. 216 pages.

Garrett Stewart, *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema*. $90.00 cloth; $40.00 paper. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 320 pages.

Given film studies' emergence between the rise of television and the arrival of home video, there is no small irony that the consolidation of the study of film as an academic discipline in the 1970s is concomitant with the curtailed exclusivity of a certain form of cinema: "the projection of a photographically recorded filmstrip in a theatrical setting" (26). There is no mistaking Rodowick's unabashed fondness for specific experiential pleasures of this form, which he evokes with the eloquence of the devout cinephile: "The analogue arts are fundamentally of intaglio, or worked matter—a literal sculpting of light by hills and valleys in the raw film whose variable density produces a visible image" (9). By contrast, digital imaging offers only *simulations* of reality; light becomes transposed into code, subsequently manifesting itself in the binary simulacra of electronic screens filled with twelve million infinitely malleable picture elements. For Rodowick, the world envisioned in *The Matrix* (1999) is in fact already upon us. Human beings in films such as *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002) or the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2000–03) are now mere guests in a computer generated universe; "synthespians" like Jar Jar Binks have as much personality as the humans with whom they share the screen, while biological actors are virtualized and rendered hyperreal in the likes of *Beowulf* (2007) or *Avatar* (2009).

However, *The Virtual Life of Film* is ambivalent on the question of cinema's new digital world. Rodowick maintains from the outset that the innate virtuality of the image is a fundamental aspect even of old-fashioned cinema. Because, whether celluloid or digital, all moving images are always already absent *and* present, both spatially uncertain *and* temporally unstable, the author points to the deepest paradox of

film experience: "the recurring desire to relive in the present a nonrepeatable past" (79). *The Virtual Life of Film* emphasizes the cinematic experience as a continuum, a double move which allows Rodowick the theorist to compare himself strikingly to the director *and* the protagonist of Jean-Luc Godard's *In Praise of Love* (2003): "simultaneously nostalgic and future-seeking, backward and forward looking, as befits contemplation of an art form undergoing a stark historical mutation" (90). A key component of this rhetorical "backward looking" is Rodowick's insistence upon a revalidation of classical film theory. Noting that the formal conventions of narrative cinema have changed little since the 1920s, Rodowick argues for the continuing significance of such writers as Roland Barthes, André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Stanley Cavell. Like Mulvey, then, Rodowick stresses the discipline's need to pause, review, and reconsider at this crucial juncture. In counterintuitively resurrecting film studies' most influential ancestors in the light of technological change, Rodowick suggests that classical theory can be reinterpreted as an unnervingly prescient body of work which "powerfully engages us in the transition to a new millennium and, perhaps, to a new medium" (79).

In pursuit of the continuities between celluloid and digital, Rodowick shrewdly notes that mimesis remains the Holy Grail of a commercial cinema seemingly in thrall to the imaginative wonderland of CGI. In industrial terms, of course, nothing has changed: the business has simply adopted new technology. And despite purists' objections, the difference between 35mm and digital projection is often overstated (and more often unnoticed). Rodowick takes great pleasure in emphasizing the ironies of this representational impasse. "If the digital is such a revolutionary process of image making," he asks, "why is its technological and aesthetic goal to become perceptually indiscernible from an earlier mode of image production?" (11) But an interesting element of generational doubt here enters the proceedings. Rodowick acknowledges that he may not be able to disentangle himself from a cinephile mindset forged within a particular cinematic epoch. Reluctantly confessing that the digital does indeed have the as-yet-unrealized potential to break free from the "cinematic metaphor" he clings to with such theoretical fervor, Rodowick admits that he too may be out of time. "[T]hose of us whose subjectivity was formed in a cinematic culture . . . may not be capable either perceptually, psychologically, or philosophically" of evaluating the new ontological era: a contemporary regime of multiple digital screens, from the camcorder to the laptop to the iPod to the videogame. "It is not *our* ontology," affirms Rodowick. "We seek a new generation of philosophers" (180).

Before passing the conceptual baton to the children of the digital revolution, Rodowick offers his own tentative musings on the future of "moving image theory." "To comprehend what becomes of visual culture today, including the cinematic image, one must look past or beneath the present image, which is in fact no image at all, but information" (125). He looks for signposts to the future in the controversial digital images leaked from Abu Ghraib, the work of experimental filmmaker Sharon Lockhart, the art installations of Sam Taylor-Wood, and Alexandr Sokurov's single-take *Russian Ark* (2002). Just as intriguing, however, is Rodowick's anecdote about how the spectacular CGI dinosaurs in the rather more commercial *Jurassic Park* (1993) required digital downgrading to improve their perceived verisimilitude. The analogue image was—and still *is*—the ontological benchmark for perceptual realism, and it remains to be seen to what extent this situation has truly changed.

Rather than attempt to map the aesthetic possibilities of the electronic image or offer a pessimistic rebuttal of the emerging digital epoch, Garrett Stewart's *Framed Time* "concerns not what can be done with the digital, but what the digital has already done to cinema" (1). *Framed Time* deals with what the author dubs "narratography," the manner in which recent cinema has itself depicted its transition from analogue to digital, filmic to postfilmic, with reference in particular to recent fantasy films. Stewart is careful to distinguish his methodology and concern with the textuality of the image from the more familiar approach of narratology. Whereas the latter is preoccupied with story forms and plot, narratography instead emphasizes "the particular forms of their visual story*telling*" (163). Like both Mulvey and Rodowick, Stewart is fascinated by the ways in which the shift from the analogue to the virtual may have altered conceptions of time. Why, he ponders, does the gradual erosion of cinema's base in photomechanical reproduction coincide with an abundance of troubling plots "obsessed by the psychosomatic contours of human temporality and human memory" (3)?

Stewart discerns two broad transatlantic trends. Firstly, he looks to Europe and the uncanny philosophical musings of *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), *Run Lola Run* (1998), and *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (1999). More extensively, however, *Framed Time* turns its attentions to Hollywood's ontological gothic as typified by the sustained postrealism of *Dark City* (1997), *Memento* (2000), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), and *The Jacket* (2005). It is difficult not to warm to the inclusive agenda of a volume which discusses seemingly ephemeral American movies such as *Identity* (2003) and *The Lake House* (2006) with the same

sobriety and seriousness of purpose as it does the revered Euro-arthouse fare of Kieślowski, Haneke, and Almodóvar. Of the widely ridiculed coda to Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* (2001), for example, Stewart offers the flamboyant counter-assessment that it remains "the most Proustian moment in contemporary cinema: *le temps retrouvé* of the whole human species, screened by an apocalyptic interface with the Other" (100).

Framed Time's narratographic approach thus serves to reinterpret the visual and thematic terrain of the cinefantastic as a reflexive postfilmic commentary on the usurping of the cinematograph by the digital image. To illustrate this point, the author turns to the *Harry Potter* franchise (2001–11): "every framed image in the land of wizardry, whether ancestral portrait or newsprint mug shot, can be found to writhe and speak within its curtailing rectangular frame—and to do so precisely as a self-referential marker of digital cinema's power to bestow such magical animation in the first place" (90). For Stewart, the remediations of our post-photomechanical epoch are registered within the fantastic mise-en-scène of contemporary cinema, a world symptomatically populated with "the digitally implanted (or otherwise virtual) memories of cyborgs, out-of-body agents, posthumous self-specters, autonomous laser holograms, computer simulants [and] schizophrenic time travellers" (16). In narrating new modes of electronic visuality, puns the author, it is now cinema's narratographic *message* which delivers the medium.

Stewart's potent critical imagination and unwavering alertness to detail imbue *Framed Time*'s interpretative strategies with great rhetorical force. Looking beyond the relatively banal family psychodrama of *One Hour Photo* (2002), Stewart finds in its *images* a mournful pre-digital nostalgia for the materiality of exposure settings, processing speeds, and the obsolete magicianship of photochemistry. Elsewhere, the mawkish father/son melodrama *Frequency* (2000) is persuasively reinterpreted as an allegory of the ecstasies of postmodern communication and broadband interactivity. "Trick" films with bewildering plot twists such as *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999) and *Vanilla Sky* (2001) move beyond mere gimmickry and instead "find ways for narrativizing (or thematizing) their own organizing logic" (142). In turn, these films expose the illusory nature and innate virtuality of all fictional narration and, by extension, the "cimnemonics" of memory and the virtualization of human life. Just as early cinema's primitive moving images were originally conceived and marketed as an extension of the domestic family snapshot, so too does contemporary "digitime"—a neologism coined by Stewart, as he explains in the book's glossary, to "capture the blurred distinction . . . between duration and change" (284)—remediate the mechanisms of memory and identity. As Stewart puts it, cinema "reconstellates the mnemonics of mentality's own reeling film in the aesthetically usable form of a screen projection" (245). Again, concepts innately related to human consciousness—real time, selective amnesia, and biographical narrative—are thematically foregrounded in recent fantasy cinema and insistently "brought into new relief against the background of cinema's shifting optical support, whether subtly, bluntly or even brutally" (208). Moreover, this brand of endlessly malleable digital posthumanism is reiterated by the interactive parallel universes opened up by supplemental DVD paratexts such as deleted scenes and alternate endings.

As fascinating and persuasive as it unarguably is, *Framed Time*'s complex conceptual pirouettes and hybridized theoretical lexicon stand in stark contrast with the lucidity and pleasing economy of *Death 24x a Second* and *The Virtual Life of Film*. Moreover, while acknowledging the seriousness with which the author approaches cinefantasy and CGI, genre enthusiasts may balk at Stewart's casual suggestion that such movies are politically disengaged and fundamentally escapist, "vehicles for little more—yet nothing less—than killing time: abandoning the imperatives of lived duration in a new theater of the unreal" (214). Early in the book, Stewart refers to films "that don't even seem to know what they're doing [but] nonetheless do what they too well know—and thus act out their own repressions for all to see" (3). Although this comment is used to expound the overarching argument that the digital unconscious of fantasy cinema is located in the convergence of narrative and *graphic* performativity, on this point Stewart falls into the age-old trap of privileging his own scholarly prowess over the both the objects of his inquiry *and* the intelligence of creative practitioners who have embraced the new digitality with irrepressible fervor. That having been said, Stewart's analyses certainly open up other fruitful readings: Peter Jackson's *King Kong* (2005) or *The Lovely Bones* (2009), for example, are films which can be easily understood as self-conscious meditations on the transition from the indexical surety of the photogram to the amorphous wonder of the digital as well as fantastical tales about giant apes and restless adolescent spirits.

These four volumes provide ample evidence for the continued ambition and vitality of film theory in the digital age. Given their shared concerns, it perhaps comes as little surprise that Stewart's book is endorsed by both Mulvey and Rodowick. It is sometimes tempting to imagine film theorists as resilient pioneers banding together against skeptical

attacks from empirically minded marauders. Like the supposed demise of cinema, however, the death of film theory has surely been overstated. As Rodowick suggests at the conclusion of *The Virtual Life of Film*, it is these continued theoretical insights which are likely to be the best preparation for an understanding of "the emergence"—if it is indeed that—"of a new audiovisual culture whose broad and indiscernible outlines we are only just beginning to distinguish" (189).

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The Essential HBO Reader
ed. Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones

It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era
ed. Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Louise Buckley

Nearly thirty years into its life, this is an ideal time to assess the pay-cable television company HBO. Fittingly, *The Essential HBO Reader* and *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era* both analyze HBO's evolution, innovation, and influence within the contemporary television landscape. Yet the books are different enough in scope and approach that they do not duplicate each other.

The Essential HBO Reader, part of University of Kentucky Press's Essential Readers in Contemporary Media and Culture series, succeeds in providing smart academic readings of HBO programming accessible to a wide readership. Bracketed by an opening essay covering HBO's history and two closing essays appraising aspects of its representational and corporate legacy, the book's four sections cover each of the channel's dominant programming areas: drama, comedy, sports, and documentary.

The drama section is the most comprehensive, rightfully so given that this is HBO's most substantial area of success and influence. Christopher Anderson authors an excellent overview, interrogating the ways in which HBO has used the original drama series to position itself as the primary symbol of "quality" television. Sharply tying the perceived cultural value of HBO drama to the network's economic motivation to retain discerning subscribers, the essay provides a revealing look at what Anderson dubs "the most solemn rite of contemporary television culture—the cultural consecration of HBO" (38). The case studies that follow perpetuate, rather than complicate, that consecration by exploring the production elements and formal characteristics that have made shows like *Angels in America*, *Oz*, *The Sopranos*, and *The Wire* so important and distinctive. Given the complexity of these dramas, it is unfortunate that the chapters are short, with most being less than ten pages. But the best essays in this section, such as Horace Newcomb's piece on *Deadwood* and Kim Akass and Janet McCabe's essay on *Six Feet Under*, succeed at distilling the most essential elements of HBO's dramas in concise yet astute prose.

The book's comedy section is similar in structure and approach. It launches with a pair of overviews: Bambi Haggins and Amanda Lotz co-author a look at HBO's stand-up comedy, while Jeffrey P. Jones surveys comedy talk shows. Both essays excel at placing this programming within an industrial context, pinpointing the ways in which HBO provides an alternative outlet for comedy. The subsequent case studies of *The Larry Sanders Show*, *Sex and the City*, and *Curb Your Enthusiasm* continue this theme of comedic alterity, with David Lavery's look at *Curb Your Enthusiasm* making for an especially delightful read as he celebrates the cantankerous Larry David by enumerating many of his character's disastrous interactions.

The documentary section relies on overviews rather than individual case studies. While Susan Murray does focus exclusively on *America Undercover*, most of HBO's documentary projects fall under that series umbrella, from high-minded fare like *Down and Out in America* to more sensationalistic programs like *G-String Divas*. Thus, with Murray's essay joined by Thomas A. Mascaro's overview of HBO documentaries and Jeffrey P. Jones's coverage of HBO's erotica, the documentary section gets somewhat repetitive, especially the overflowing (even if deserved) praise for Sheila Nevins, the longtime head of HBO's documentary division. That said, the Murray and Jones chapters perceptively explore how the curious coupling of socially relevant and sexually exploitative elements across HBO's documentaries fits exactly with the network's broader attempts to market its programming as above and beyond network fare. Jones additionally makes a convincing case for the social importance of what many view as purely sensationalistic material in shows like *Real Sex* and *Taxicab Confessions*.

Besides the brevity of most essays, which leaves some key ideas underexplored, the other weakness in *The Essential HBO Reader* is the relative lack of critical interrogation of HBO's claims of exclusivity and quality, embodied by the famous "It's not TV, It's HBO" slogan. Gary Edgerton's opening essay, for instance, praises HBO for its breakthrough programming and pioneering economic models, but offers exultant quotes from former HBO chairman Chris Albrecht as if they were evidence of HBO's preeminence, rather than

part of a comprehensive marketing scheme or descendants of quality television rhetoric that stretches back to broadcast television's earliest days. Similarly, a number of the essays in the drama and comedy sections conclude with a reiteration of the idea that because HBO does not have to kowtow to advertisers and the FCC, its shows have nearly unlimited creative license. While this is true in some measure, HBO is still limited by its own network identity and subscriber demands. Furthermore, it can be tiresome to read the same argument repeatedly expressed.

The major exception to *The Essential HBO Reader*'s overall praise for its subject is Toby Miller and Linda J. Kim's essay, which alone constitutes the sports section. This strikingly provocative chapter focuses primarily on HBO's substantial involvement in boxing, and it pulls no punches in being highly critical of the network's exploitation of the sport and its participants, questioning not just the morality but even the legality of HBO's combined administration and coverage of boxing. Because of its strong polemical stance, as well as its expectation that the reader has at least passing familiarity with theories of political economy, the essay doesn't actually seem to belong in this book.

In fact, it would fit much better in *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*. Toby Miller does pen the book's foreword, which argues that the book is as much about television studies as a discipline as it is about HBO and its acclaimed shows. As such, rather than organizing the chapters by programming types, *It's Not TV* separates its three sections in terms of media-studies perspectives: industries and economies, texts and contexts, and audiences and identities. Drawing from approaches as varied as political economy, cultural studies, formal analysis, queer theory, and genre theory, the book asks an overarching set of questions: is HBO really "not TV," and what does a "not TV" industry, text, and audience look like?

The opening industry section provides the most comprehensive deconstruction of the not-TV concept, and it is launched by a penetrating essay by Avi Santo on HBO's production culture. Santo argues that HBO is neither TV nor not-TV; it is instead "para-television," defined as "production practices and programming choices that are purposely situated alongside recognizable television forms in order to confer particular meanings upon them" (24). In other words, HBO does draw heavily on existing forms and practices of television, as the syndication of the channel's programs would indicate, but it simultaneously innovates in order to distinguish itself as superior. While this preoccupation has been central to HBO's success, Santo observes that it can also put HBO in a bind. For instance, driven to emphasize distinction because of its subscription model, HBO is forced to keep innovating, rather than copy past successes, and while that ethos is a plus for fostering programming diversity, it can interfere with a corporate bottom line. Santo's claims are complemented by the other essays in this section, including Tony Kelso's analysis of HBO's business model and another essay by Janet McCabe and Kim Akass, this one looking at the mobilization of HBO's quality rhetoric. The section also features an analysis of HBO Asia by Shawn McIntosh, lending a global perspective on HBO's corporate activities.

The next section moves from industrial factors to aesthetics. David Marc's analysis of *Carnivale* and Lisa Williamson's look at HBO sitcoms echo the previous section's arguments productively. Williamson argues that HBO's comedies transform genre conventions beyond just those of the sitcom, targeting a savvy audience willing to pay for unorthodox comedy. Marc contends that an excess of innovation doomed *Carnivale*, thereby illustrating that HBO's failures are as revealing as its successes. This section also includes the most deliberately provocative essay in the book, Marc Leverette's piece on the graphic language, violence, and sex contained within HBO's programming. Leverette indulges himself a bit excessively in flouting linguistic taboos, but in doing so he underscores his central point: that HBO uses such transgressive content to position itself as operating outside of television norms, even as that becomes a formula in itself that predictably satisfies audience desires for defying boundaries.

The final section of *It's Not TV* focuses on the audience. Conor McGrath and Rhiannon Bury separately refer to HBO's online forums in order to explore the reception of *K Street* and *Six Feet Under*, respectively. Like David Marc, McGrath finds that HBO does have creative limits based on audience expectation; while individual program ratings might not matter, viewer response certainly does. Bury presents an engagingly complex argument about taste cultures, asserting that HBO's viewers position themselves as "quality audiences" of quality television, and their cultured tastes fit neatly in line with traditional bourgeois aesthetic standards in both progressive and regressive ways. This section's final two essays reveal more about the texts under analysis than their audiences, but they suitably round out the book overall. Cara Louise Buckley and Brian L. Ott provide a queer reading of Carrie's consumer habits in *Sex and the City*, arguing at the end that while such practices often "function hegemonically to maintain prevailing relations of power," they can also "offer more socially resistive and transgressive possibilities" (212). Joanna L. Di Mattia closes the book with an eloquently written essay about *Angels in America* and the ways in which it relentlessly makes visible the traditionally invisible gay

body, thereby highlighting both HBO's innovative practices but also the overwhelming limitations of gay representation elsewhere on television.

Di Mattia's essay is a fitting end to *It's Not TV*, with its sophisticated integration of queer theory, postmodernism, and formal analysis and its manifold interrogation of the relation of HBO programming to television in general. As such, it also indicates a larger point: *The Essential HBO Reader* is a solid read for the HBO enthusiast, but *It's Not TV* is really the essential HBO reader for academics. © 2010 Christine Becker

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BOOK DATA Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones (eds), *The Essential HBO Reader* Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009. $50.00 cloth; $25.00 paper. 384 pages.

Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Louise Buckley (eds), *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*. New York: Routledge, 2008. $95.00 cloth; $29.95 paper. 260 pages.

MICHELE SCHREIBER

Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Culture ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra

Perhaps because postfeminist popular culture is such a contested area despite numerous panels at academic conferences on the topic (including the one convened in 2004 at the University of East Anglia, U.K., by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, from which this resulting book takes its title), only two full-length books had addressed it through 2001. Tania Modelski's *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Era* (1991) and Sarah Projansky's *Watching Rape: Film and Television in a Postfeminist Culture* (New York University Press, 2001) were published ten years apart and Negra's *What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (Routledge, 2009) is the only other specialist volume to have appeared since then. The paucity of scholarly literature is all the more surprising given that related nonacademic books such as Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (Crown, 1991) have been bestsellers. Thus *Interrogating Postfeminism*, a productive and diverse collection of articles, usefully helps to fill a gap in film and media studies literature.

What is postfeminism and what is its impact on popular culture? Tasker and Negra offer the following definition, which is worth quoting at length: "Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment. Assuming full economic freedom for women, postfeminist culture also (even insistently) enacts the possibility that women might *choose* to retreat from the public world of work . . . As this suggests, postfeminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self" (2). In the world of postfeminism, the struggles of the second wave of feminism—"the personal is political," community activism, equality, reproductive rights—have withered away to such trivial forms of "empowerment" as plastic surgery and "cardio striptease" exercise classes.

Tasker and Negra contend that postfeminist media texts are intriguing because they rarely resist or critique feminism explicitly. Instead they undermine feminism by implying that its goals have been accomplished and so it is time to move on or, even, to enjoy the benefits. "The 'taken into accountness' permits an all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal" (28), as Angela McRobbie puts it in "Postfeminism and Popular Culture," one of the anthology's most illuminating articles. She goes on to discuss a quintessential postfeminist text, the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary*, arguing that it invokes feminism only to end up celebrating the most conservative of happy endings, the traditional marriage ceremony. Thus, according to McRobbie, "feminism is only invoked in order to be relegated to the past" (37).

Interrogating Postfeminism is not intended to be a comprehensive account of the topic. The editors state that the volume "speaks to an emerging body of work that . . . remains unsure about its material, limits, and theoretical territory" (11), though one of the most valuable parts of the book is the lengthy introduction itself. The territorial uncertainty is reflected in the anthology's organization, which with its lack of subsections has no obvious trajectory and might be at risk of raising more questions than it answers, particularly for the reader who is new to the debate about postfeminism. However, this diversity is also a kind of strength as the anthology moves beyond postfeminism's "greatest hits," such as *Sex and the City* and *Ally McBeal* to include a wide array of texts, including Riot Grrrl music (Anna Feigenbaum, "Remapping the Resonances of Riot Grrrl"), the children's show *Dora the Explorer* (Sarah Banet-Weiser, "What's Your Flava?"), and even Quentin Tarantino's films (Lisa Coulthard's "Killing Bill: Film Feminism and Film Violence").

Among the highlight contributions is Sarah Projansky's "Mass Magazine Cover Girls," in which the author summa-

body, thereby highlighting both HBO's innovative practices but also the overwhelming limitations of gay representation elsewhere on television.

Di Mattia's essay is a fitting end to *It's Not TV*, with its sophisticated integration of queer theory, postmodernism, and formal analysis and its manifold interrogation of the relation of HBO programming to television in general. As such, it also indicates a larger point: *The Essential HBO Reader* is a solid read for the HBO enthusiast, but *It's Not TV* is really the essential HBO reader for academics. © 2010 Christine Becker

CHRISTINE BECKER teaches at the University of Notre Dame.

BOOK DATA Gary R. Edgerton and Jeffrey P. Jones (eds), *The Essential HBO Reader* Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009. $50.00 cloth; $25.00 paper. 384 pages.

Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott, and Cara Louise Buckley (eds), *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era*. New York: Routledge, 2008. $95.00 cloth; $29.95 paper. 260 pages.

MICHELE SCHREIBER

Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Culture ed. Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra

Perhaps because postfeminist popular culture is such a contested area despite numerous panels at academic conferences on the topic (including the one convened in 2004 at the University of East Anglia, U.K., by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, from which this resulting book takes its title), only two full-length books had addressed it through 2001. Tania Modelski's *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Era* (1991) and Sarah Projansky's *Watching Rape: Film and Television in a Postfeminist Culture* (New York University Press, 2001) were published ten years apart and Negra's *What a Girl Wants: Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism* (Routledge, 2009) is the only other specialist volume to have appeared since then. The paucity of scholarly literature is all the more surprising given that related nonacademic books such as Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (Crown, 1991) have been bestsellers. Thus *Interrogating Postfeminism*, a productive and diverse collection of articles, usefully helps to fill a gap in film and media studies literature.

What is postfeminism and what is its impact on popular culture? Tasker and Negra offer the following definition, which is worth quoting at length: "Postfeminist culture works in part to incorporate, assume, or naturalize aspects of feminism; crucially, it also works to commodify feminism via the figure of woman as empowered consumer. Thus, postfeminist culture emphasizes educational and professional opportunities for women and girls; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment. Assuming full economic freedom for women, postfeminist culture also (even insistently) enacts the possibility that women might *choose* to retreat from the public world of work . . . As this suggests, postfeminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self" (2). In the world of postfeminism, the struggles of the second wave of feminism—"the personal is political," community activism, equality, reproductive rights—have withered away to such trivial forms of "empowerment" as plastic surgery and "cardio striptease" exercise classes.

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rizes an exhaustive analysis of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine cover stories since 1990. She argues that the magazines' cover girls fall into two opposing but often overlapping categories: "at-risk" (in danger, needing to be saved) or "can-do" (fully capable and in charge of their future). Girls who fall between these two categories arouse cultural anxiety, uncovering "an uneasiness, ambiguousness, and ambivalence about girlhood" (48). Projansky's fascinating analysis has applicability for both postfeminism and what is becoming known as girls' studies, and is particularly relevant in light of the recent wave of "tween" film and television texts, such as the *Hannah Montana* franchise. Another standout piece is Suzanne Leonard's "'I Hate My Job, I Hate Everybody Here,'" which ventures into the previously underexplored intersection of independent cinema and class. Leonard's analysis of *The Good Girl* (2002) in terms of its portrayal of the economic and social realities underlying women's work provides a refreshing and enlightening contrast to the idea of work as some sort of "lifestyle choice." Overall, feminist film and media studies, cultural studies and women's studies graduate students and scholars should welcome *Interrogating Postfeminism*. The articles go beyond the expected and open up numerous avenues for further investigation. © 2010 Michele Schreiber

MICHELE SCHREIBER is Assistant Professor of Film Studies at Emory University.

BOOK DATA Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (eds), *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. $89.95 cloth; $24.95 paper. 344 pages.

RICHARD GRUPENHOFF

Oscar Micheaux: The Great and Only—The Life of America's First Black Filmmaker by Patrick McGilligan

Oscar Micheaux (1884–1951) was born in Metropolis, Illinois, the fifth of eleven children of former slaves. At sixteen he left the family farm to seek his fortune in Chicago, and for the next four years he worked at a variety of jobs: shoeshine man, coal miner, stockyard worker, and Pullman porter. In 1904, at the age of twenty, he took his meager savings and purchased a homestead in South Dakota, determined to become a successful farmer. But ten years later, after his attempts at farming had failed, he took to writing about his experiences, and then turned to filmmaking. Between 1914 and 1919 Micheaux reinvented himself and, as Patrick McGilligan writes in this biography, "finally found the combination of autobiography, social criticism, fiction, and show business that was his natural calling" (128). A self-taught filmmaker, Micheaux wrote, produced, directed, edited, and distributed the first full-length feature film about the black experience, *The Homesteader*, in 1919. During the next thirty years he would produce more than forty other race movies, making him the most prolific African American filmmaker to date. McGilligan begins his book with the assertion that Micheaux "deserves to be considered in the same breath as the sainted D. W. Griffith" (2) and then spends the remainder of it attempting to justify this claim.

Micheaux and Griffith were contemporaries, born less then a decade apart, and they died within three years of each other. Griffith's reputation is based primarily on his 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*, an aesthetic masterpiece for its time, but a racist diatribe nonetheless. Indeed, one of the reasons Micheaux and other African American filmmakers took up filmmaking was to counter Griffith by depicting African Americans in a positive light. In fact, Micheaux's second film, *Within Our Gates*, made in 1920, was Micheaux's response to *The Birth of a Nation*. But while Griffith had a large budget for production and advertising, Micheaux had very little money to back his film, and *Within Our Gates* was soon forgotten, and was lost for the next fifty years. Griffith became famous while Micheaux, like his film, was consigned to the margins of film history.

This is not to deny that over the years some have been aware of Micheaux's significant place in film history; still, little has been known about his life until now. Even the basic facts are sketchy: Micheaux's birth date, for example, remains a matter of conjecture and the true circumstances of his death have never been determined. But McGilligan has carefully pieced together information derived from previous scholarly research, newspaper articles, oral histories, legal records, and Micheaux's own semi-autobiographical films and novels. Micheaux was an independent artist producing black-cast race movies on shoestring budgets for a relatively small black audience. Couple these economic and social conditions with Micheaux's deep-seated stubbornness and his prevarications, deceptions, and deliberate misdirections, and you have a complex life story that is a formidable task to reconstruct. Yet McGilligan does just that in this detailed and comprehensive narrative. It is well written and accessible to all, scholars and film buffs alike. Students new to the study of Micheaux are particularly well served by the valuable chapter notes, index, and filmography. The book also includes twenty-four high-quality photos.

According to McGilligan, there were many reasons why Micheaux was marginalized. First, of course, was his race. Making race movies was neither popular nor profitable. There was always the lack of money for production, the lack

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of a sophisticated distribution network, censorious state film review boards, and prejudiced white theater owners who refused to book his films. The white press and white audiences ignored his efforts. While some black audience members enjoyed his films for the positive images they presented of African Americans, many others stayed away because Micheaux also insisted upon showing a sordid underworld of drinking, gambling, violence, and the hypocrisy of black religious leaders. (Micheaux was also accused by some of a form of racial fetishism by pitting light-skinned blacks against darker-skinned ones, a charge McGilligan discusses only briefly and takes no position on, perhaps because it remains unsubstantiated.)

McGilligan succeeds in making his case that Micheaux certainly does deserve to be considered in the same breath as Griffith. He fashions a compelling story of the unique life of this "Great and Only" man, one who is finally beginning to be broadly recognized as having an important place among those who have led inspirational lives in the struggle for racial equality and artistic integrity. Micheaux was a Sisyphus of his age, always pushing the boulder of race up the hill, knowing he had to do it every day over and over again if he was going to live his life the way he wanted to live it. Always the outsider as he made his way in the white man's world, he nevertheless lived a full life, even though he died penniless and forgotten. Loved by a few, vilified by many, misunderstood by most, Micheaux disappeared from public view for a half-century after his death, but now, happily, he is reincarnated again in this definitive biography. © 2010 Richard Grupenhoff

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BOOK DATA Patrick McGilligan, *Oscar Micheaux, the Great and Only—The Life of America's First Black Filmmaker.* New York: Harper, 2007. $29.95 cloth; $16.95 paper. 416 pages.

ARTHUR KNIGHT

D. W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation": A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time" by Melvyn Stokes

Near the end of the introduction to his compendious and lucid book, Melvyn Stokes writes, "Why, it might be asked, is yet another scholarly book on [*The Birth of a Nation*] needed?" (13) Stokes has good answers to this question: so much has been written over the years about *The Birth of a Nation* that a thoroughgoing synthesis is in order. But precisely because of the volume of writing, there is much misinformation about *The Birth of a Nation* that needs correcting. Additionally, there is a great deal that is not known about this disturbingly seminal film—and much that scholars, often working mostly as interpreters of the text of the film, have argued cannot be known about it—so fresh attention to archival materials is desirable. Stokes promises synthesis, informational correction, and wholesale plumbing of the archives, and he delivers on all counts.

Stokes puts the better part of his book's subtitle in quotation marks. The claim that *The Birth of a Nation* is the most controversial movie ever comes from one of its financiers, Roy Aitken, but Stokes makes clear that the claim is not just hype. He sees *The Birth of a Nation* as unusual because the cause for the controversy was not explicit sex or violence, the two preponderant reasons for censorious alarm, but explicit and brutal racism. To be sure, in the later decades of the twentieth century, protests against films for misrepresenting specific social groups became more common, but for Stokes the long history of protest against *The Birth of a Nation*'s exhibition presaged this way of responding to movies. Additionally unusual in the case of Griffith's film is that its controversial element was, from the start, entangled with—but also, for many and for too long, excused or even justified by—its innovative qualities. Surveying the literature of protest against the film, Stokes often finds its detractors ruefully conceding its stylistic and aesthetic powers: its fluid movement across narrative and pictorial scales; its dynamic editing; its rousing use of music. Only really in the 1980s, as Stokes shows in his survey of scholarship, did critics like Brian Gallagher, Michael Rogin, and Clyde Taylor start to insist that the film's content and form should be thought of as inescapably interrelated. Stokes at once agrees with this assessment and works to historicize the long career of *The Birth of a Nation* so we can understand why it took decades for this critical position to become dominant. Stokes draws from the film scholars who have preceded him—those named above, as well as writers such as Linda Williams and Susan Courtney—but his book probably has most in common with Janet Staiger's chapter on the film in *Interpreting Films* (Princeton University Press, 1992), and as a cultural historian Stokes is more cautious with his generalizations and strong interpretive claims than many of his predecessors.

In his opening chapter Stokes describes the February 1915 Los Angeles premiere of the film, still called *The Clansman* after its sources in Thomas Dixon Jr.'s novel and play. This effectively captures the sense of daring and excitement that the film created for its earliest audience, and it also allows Stokes to both synopsize the story and review some of the issues of *The Birth of a Nation*'s textual instability. After this opening flash-forward, Stokes organizes his book in the-

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matic chapters that allow him to create a linear, if also often overlapping, narrative. His first subject is Thomas Dixon. He tracks this preacher–entrepreneur–writer's emotional and intellectual formation in the post-Civil War South as well as thoroughly examining Dixon's novel, the play he adapted from it, and his own unsuccessful attempts to translate his successes to the screen. A chapter then gives Griffith and his life and career up to 1915 similar treatment. Much of this material will be familiar to those who have studied Griffith, but the chapter also provides interesting new information on the details of how the film's production was arranged.

The book's fourth chapter focuses on the making of the film, from pre-production through the process of editing the film and showing it to its earliest audiences in L.A. and New York. This is perhaps the most myth-busting chapter of the book, with Stokes detailing what can be known or deduced from records about cast size and the costs and financing of the film (basically, big on all fronts and dauntingly complex, especially by the standards of the day, but not nearly as big as the hype). Examining race in relation to the casting of extras and the use of blackening make-up (though not uniformly the stereotypical blackface minstrel mask) for its "black" principals, Stokes finds it "highly revealing" that in a 1916 interview with *Photoplay* Griffith explained his casting and make-up choices "in terms of straightforward racism: the desirability of excluding 'black blood'" (87).

The second half of the book will be, for many, the most interesting and innovative. Here Stokes examines the marketing and distribution of *The Birth of a Nation*, the initial struggles to censor or suppress the film, arguments about its validity or invalidity as history, and the film's career and resonances after its initial run. These four chapters find Stokes doing his most vigorous synthesis of previous scholarship—he draws from an impressive range of sources in film studies, history and historiography, African American studies, legal studies, and business history—as well as his broadest new research. Stokes's narrative of responses to *The Birth of a Nation*, both in its initial run and across the rest of the twentieth century, is invaluable for those interested in African Americans and U.S. cinema, and his consideration of *The Birth of a Nation* as "history," along with his laying out of the film's innovative marketing, adds considerably to our understanding of its huge popularity. © 2010 Arthur Knight

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BOOK DATA Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation": A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time."* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. $99.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 432 pages.

STEVE NEALE

The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s by Lea Jacobs

Hollywood cinema is often said to have changed after World War I. In addition to vertical integration, a new oligopoly, and substantial Wall Street investment, historians have pointed to changes in the nature of Hollywood's films. While some of these changes predate the 1920s, they are usually said to involve the advent of a new sexual permissiveness, new gender stereotypes, and a number of new genres and styles, each of them linked to an emergent mass consumer culture. *The Decline of Sentiment* deals with these changes too, but it does so in an innovative way.

Focusing on the literary upheavals of the period, and in particular on the reaction against genteel Victorian values and canons of taste, Jacobs argues that there are corresponding though by no means identical changes of taste at the level of film as well. These changes are manifest not just in the film industry's output, but also in discussions of stylistic and generic trends as well as audiences and their preferences in the industry press. Jacobs is particularly concerned with female tastes and with issues of gender. But she also points to differences between the tastes of metropolitan and rural or small-town audiences. Noting that metropolitan intellectuals tended to associate pathos and sentiment with genteel culture, she points out that these ingredients were often just as central to the vernacular, mass-culture taste for slapstick or jazz. The decline in sentiment that she charts in her book is thus an uneven one, varying from genre to genre, but also from class to class and from place to place.

In pursuing her argument, Jacobs looks in detail at five different story types, genres, and trends: "Hollywood Naturalism," "Sophisticated Comedy," "The Male Adventure Story," "The Seduction Plot," and "Romantic Drama." In each case she analyzes the narrative and stylistic characteristics of a wide range of films (some of them only available in archives); and in each case she cites reviews and other comments in the industry press. Hollywood naturalism, she argues, was a marginal but significant trend that drew on the tenets of literary naturalism and on some of its novels and plays. For Jacobs, it not only encompassed films such as *Greed* (1925) and *The Docks of New York* (1928), each of them marked by brutal actions, sordid motives, and protagonists overwhelmed by their passions or by their environment, but also a number of rural comedies and dramas, among them *True Heart Susie* (1919) and *The Old Swimmin' Hole* (1921). Despite their obvious differences, and despite the overemphatic symbolism evident

matic chapters that allow him to create a linear, if also often overlapping, narrative. His first subject is Thomas Dixon. He tracks this preacher–entrepreneur–writer's emotional and intellectual formation in the post-Civil War South as well as thoroughly examining Dixon's novel, the play he adapted from it, and his own unsuccessful attempts to translate his successes to the screen. A chapter then gives Griffith and his life and career up to 1915 similar treatment. Much of this material will be familiar to those who have studied Griffith, but the chapter also provides interesting new information on the details of how the film's production was arranged.

The book's fourth chapter focuses on the making of the film, from pre-production through the process of editing the film and showing it to its earliest audiences in L.A. and New York. This is perhaps the most myth-busting chapter of the book, with Stokes detailing what can be known or deduced from records about cast size and the costs and financing of the film (basically, big on all fronts and dauntingly complex, especially by the standards of the day, but not nearly as big as the hype). Examining race in relation to the casting of extras and the use of blackening make-up (though not uniformly the stereotypical blackface minstrel mask) for its "black" principals, Stokes finds it "highly revealing" that in a 1916 interview with *Photoplay* Griffith explained his casting and make-up choices "in terms of straightforward racism: the desirability of excluding 'black blood'" (87).

The second half of the book will be, for many, the most interesting and innovative. Here Stokes examines the marketing and distribution of *The Birth of a Nation*, the initial struggles to censor or suppress the film, arguments about its validity or invalidity as history, and the film's career and resonances after its initial run. These four chapters find Stokes doing his most vigorous synthesis of previous scholarship—he draws from an impressive range of sources in film studies, history and historiography, African American studies, legal studies, and business history—as well as his broadest new research. Stokes's narrative of responses to *The Birth of a Nation*, both in its initial run and across the rest of the twentieth century, is invaluable for those interested in African Americans and U.S. cinema, and his consideration of *The Birth of a Nation* as "history," along with his laying out of the film's innovative marketing, adds considerably to our understanding of its huge popularity. © 2010 Arthur Knight

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BOOK DATA Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation": A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time."* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. $99.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 432 pages.

STEVE NEALE

The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s by Lea Jacobs

Hollywood cinema is often said to have changed after World War I. In addition to vertical integration, a new oligopoly, and substantial Wall Street investment, historians have pointed to changes in the nature of Hollywood's films. While some of these changes predate the 1920s, they are usually said to involve the advent of a new sexual permissiveness, new gender stereotypes, and a number of new genres and styles, each of them linked to an emergent mass consumer culture. *The Decline of Sentiment* deals with these changes too, but it does so in an innovative way.

Focusing on the literary upheavals of the period, and in particular on the reaction against genteel Victorian values and canons of taste, Jacobs argues that there are corresponding though by no means identical changes of taste at the level of film as well. These changes are manifest not just in the film industry's output, but also in discussions of stylistic and generic trends as well as audiences and their preferences in the industry press. Jacobs is particularly concerned with female tastes and with issues of gender. But she also points to differences between the tastes of metropolitan and rural or small-town audiences. Noting that metropolitan intellectuals tended to associate pathos and sentiment with genteel culture, she points out that these ingredients were often just as central to the vernacular, mass-culture taste for slapstick or jazz. The decline in sentiment that she charts in her book is thus an uneven one, varying from genre to genre, but also from class to class and from place to place.

In pursuing her argument, Jacobs looks in detail at five different story types, genres, and trends: "Hollywood Naturalism," "Sophisticated Comedy," "The Male Adventure Story," "The Seduction Plot," and "Romantic Drama." In each case she analyzes the narrative and stylistic characteristics of a wide range of films (some of them only available in archives); and in each case she cites reviews and other comments in the industry press. Hollywood naturalism, she argues, was a marginal but significant trend that drew on the tenets of literary naturalism and on some of its novels and plays. For Jacobs, it not only encompassed films such as *Greed* (1925) and *The Docks of New York* (1928), each of them marked by brutal actions, sordid motives, and protagonists overwhelmed by their passions or by their environment, but also a number of rural comedies and dramas, among them *True Heart Susie* (1919) and *The Old Swimmin' Hole* (1921). Despite their obvious differences, and despite the overemphatic symbolism evident

in films like *Greed*, many of these films shared an influential preference for simple plots, de-dramatized scenes and situations, restrained modes of storytelling, informal styles of acting, and attempts in the intertitles to mimic vernacular styles of speech.

Some of these qualities mark sophisticated comedies such as *A Woman of Paris* (1923) and *Open All Night* (1924) as well. Although set in upper-class milieux, these films were all praised for their subdued effects, their understated dramaturgy, their avoidance of didacticism, and their deployment of up-to-date techniques. Moreover, while the male adventure films that Jacobs discusses next tended to eschew the settings, elegance, and tone of the comedies, they drew extensively on the informal performance styles and vernacular language in the naturalist films. The gangster films and some of the war films and military comedies also eschewed didacticism, reducing the scope for sentiment, and attenuating or marginalizing the importance of female characters and heterosexual romance. They also began to employ markedly terse or elliptical modes of narration. These qualities were all seen as modern. Nevertheless, as Jacobs stresses, romance plots and prominent female characters could still be found in most 1920s Westerns as well as in major war films such as *The Big Parade* (1925) and *Wings* (1927).

Films centered firmly on female characters are discussed in the chapters on the seduction plot and the romantic drama. A staple of genteel culture, the seduction plot was, by the early 1920s, increasingly seen as old-fashioned and overly sentimental. From that point on, low-budget seduction films were frequently dismissed as appealing only to rural or neighborhood audiences and comedy variants became much more common. Later in the decade, films such as *Women Love Diamonds* (1927) began to undertake more complex investigations of the effects of money and class on sexual relationships, but they risked commercial failure and censure in doing so.

Alongside comic seduction stories and "society dramas" (love stories with contemporary upper-class settings, among them a number of flapper and "flaming youth" films), romantic dramas were seen by the industry as appealing in particular to female audiences. Exemplified by films such as *The Sheik* (1921) and *Don Juan* (1926), most 1920s romantic dramas were marked by exotic or historical settings and by the presence of matinee idols such as Rudolph Valentino and John Barrymore alongside female stars such as Vilma Banky and Norma Talmadge. These films were popular. But they were increasingly criticized for their elevated language and overblown style. Exceptions such as *Seventh Heaven* (1928), set as it was among the lower classes, were on the other hand highly praised.

Jacobs concludes by noting that what later became known as "the woman's film" was in fact rather different in kind from films like these, that a taste for lachrymose stories was as not necessarily gender-specific, and that the innovations in style she discusses often encompassed both "male" and "female" genres. In substantiating her argument, she draws on a refreshingly wide range of films and sources, producing a book that is often as nuanced and sophisticated as the comedies she discusses in chapter three. © 2010 Steve Neale

STEVE NEALE is Professor of Film Studies at the University of Exeter.

BOOK DATA Lea Jacobs, *The Decline of Sentiment: American Film in the 1920s.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. $70.00 cloth; $27.50 paper. 374 pages.

PAUL FILERI

French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism by Peter J. Bloom

Based on meticulous archival research, *French Colonial Documentary* provides an historical account of documentary film production during the Third Republic (1870–1940) and also poses more far-reaching theoretical questions about the key role of cinema in what the author calls the French "colonial media apparatus" (ix). With reference to pre-cinematic optical devices, military newsreel compilations, travelogues, medical and hygiene instructional shorts, and feature-length educational films, Peter J. Bloom ranges widely in order to argue that documentary filmmaking served an important function in the development of the empire.

By focusing on the visual rhetoric of films as well as their institutional contexts, Bloom makes a strong case that French colonial documentaries in this interwar period relied on a language of humanitarian and civilizing social reform as much as that of military pacification. Following Althusserian Marxian and psychoanalytic cultural theory as well as Fou-

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cault's work on disciplinary relations of knowledge and power, Bloom's analysis aims to expose ideology at work in particular films as well as to develop a broad account of cinema as a tool for imperial governance. Ultimately, the book suggests that the contemporary relevance of its subject derives from how it rested on "rhetorical claims for humanitarian responsibility founded on security, human catastrophe, and civilization" (ix). Appealing to Giorgio Agamben's writing on power and sovereignty, Bloom sees the "humanitarian ethic" evident in these films as a precursor to the "imperial hubris" of humanitarian intervention today, in which NGOs often distribute documentary images that end up "depoliticizing disaster, obstructing an understanding of its local and global contexts, and producing victims as ciphers devoid of political agency" (ix).

Bloom begins his study by seeking the origins of colonial documentary cinema in the Enlightenment philosophical ideas of "natural man" and of theories of human development based on racial and geographic differences. Before the emergence of cinema, scientists experimented with technological devices of inscription, such as the dynamometer and ergograph, in efforts to measure and classify people based on a racist theory of a universal hierarchy extending from primitive savage to rational civilized man. Bloom shows how these preexisting notions—the progress of scientific knowledge and "the civilizing powers of modernity"—were the foundation for documentary cinema's promotion of "the colonial idea," notably the Third Republic's justification of imperial rule as the work of civilization rather than conquest (30). What Bloom refers to as the humanitarian colonial humanism of this enterprise went hand in hand with an interwar culture celebrating "works of empire" undertaken by physically and morally rejuvenated Frenchmen.

The rest of the book considers this *mission civilisatrice* of documentary cinema in relation to five institutional activities and bodies of knowledge crucial to interwar colonial consolidation and reform: military service and psychiatry; automobile expedition and tourism; hygiene reform and microbiology; public education and crowd psychology; philanthropy and international cooperation. Bloom looks at a wide range of films and writings in order to trace connections among projects undertaken in the colonized territories of North Africa, French West and Equatorial Africa, Indochina, and the South Pacific. Chapter 2 teases out the meaning of the shifting representations of the iconic figure of the Senegalese sharpshooter—depicted as a loyal African soldier serving in the French military forces, a loyal sentinel on the imperial frontier—in a host of propaganda films. This leads into the following chapters' examinations of two key forms of documentary: the colonial crossing film, exemplified by the most widely cited French documentary of the period, *Black Journey* (*La Croisière noire*, 1925, Léon Poirer), depicting Citroën vehicles slicing through an exoticized African landscape, and the short educational science film, used in public hygiene campaigns. In chapter 5, Bloom focuses on the French colonial enterprise at its height, considering the centerpiece film program commissioned for the 1931 Parisian Colonial Exhibition. He traces how the French state reshaped its vision of civic pedagogy in setting up colonial film committees and journals devoted to integrating film into public schools and employing instructional films to influence public opinion. The policy involved "making France known to the colonies, and the colonies to France" (127).

The critical project of *French Colonial Documentary* comes into sharpest focus in the last chapter, in which Bloom contends that the French discourse on civilization was soon taken up on the international stage. He also describes how domination became obscured and legitimized in the notion of enlightenment and civilization advanced in philanthropist Albert Kahn's Archives de la Planète (1910–31) film and photography collection, Henri Bergson's philosophical work on universal time and advocacy for international cooperation, and the international educational film initiatives launched by the League of Nations. Bloom concludes that documentary cinema was mobilized as "the ultimate instrument of an emergent form of internationalism" in such organizations as the Institute for Cinematographic Education in the 1920s (180).

French Colonial Documentary joins such fine recent books as Priya Jaikumar's *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in British and India* (2006), Michael Baskett's *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (2008), and Brian Larkin's *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (2008) in exploring the neglected ways that cinema as a medium, industry, and institution played a part in colonization. The book also includes a guide to archival resources—a testament to the author's painstaking work with primary materials—that should prove immensely useful to future researchers. © 2010 Paul Fileri

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BOOK DATA: Peter J. Bloom, *French Colonial Documentary: Mythologies of Humanitarianism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. $75.00 cloth; $25.00 paper. 280 pages.

REALMS OF GOLD

I can think of no film that repays repeated viewings more generously than Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*. Its Mozartian complexities have been remarked repeatedly, but never resolved. Nor indeed does Keith Reader's altogether admirable monograph attempt to resolve them. What Reader's study does instead by covering the film's reception as well as its content is to indicate the extent to which even misapprehensions or misjudgments of Renoir's masterpiece (which flopped when it opened) turn out to be revealing despite themselves. Reader calls attention to "the viciousness of the responses" the film "was capable, almost by way of a tribute *a contrario*, of unleashing" (23). People have been trying to get the measure of *The Rules of the Game* ever since it was first shown two months before the outbreak of World War II. The misjudgments sometimes proffered as a result may be wrong or overdrawn (at least in the present reviewer's eyes), but they are never ridiculous or preposterous; looked at from the right vantage point, they will tell us something.

The ironies here run deep. Julian Jackson's no less valuable monograph on *The Grand Illusion* points out that "despite the vagaries of the film's reception"—*The Grand Illusion* was at no point a favorite of the *Cahiers du cinéma* crowd, who treated it disdainfully—"the film enjoyed general popular success. It became the emblematic Renoir film, screened on French TV during an homage to Renoir on his 80th birthday and again on his death in 1979. It may never have been Renoir's favorite [among his own films], but it was the film people remembered him by" (101). I think Jackson is on the money here, and he has raised an intriguing point into the bargain. This is that the two films, whatever their provenance, are very different, in temper, character, and ambit.

It was in 1986 that the Canadian film scholar Christopher Faulkner in his Princeton University Press book *The Social Cinema of Jean Renoir* (which I reviewed in this journal in spring 1988) attempted to demolish the rather fawning adulation of Renoir as auteur he thought André Bazin and François Truffaut had perpetrated. I thought at the time and still think today that this task was well worth doing (see my "The Sorcerer's Apprentice: Bazin and Truffaut on Renoir," *Sight and Sound*, winter 1974–75). The trouble is that Faulkner for his part carried it out by using what I take to have been a blunt instrument, the then-fashionable Althusserian notion of the "epistemological break," which in Faulkner's words entails "a radical change for the social function of art and the role of the artist-intellectual." To juxtapose *The Rules of the Game* to *The Grand Illusion* is in a way to clinch Faulkner's point as he proceeded to cast doubt on the auteurism of quite a long list of critical precursors—Alexander Sesonske, Leo Braudy, and Raymond Durgnat as well as Bazin and Truffaut. But there is a problem buried not very far beneath the surface of Faulkner's argument. Like most people who invoked the notion of an epistemological break (including, as it happens, *Maître* Althusser himself), Faulkner fails to indicate why it only occurs once in anyone's career. In Renoir's instance I would argue that it or something like it happened over and over again. This is easy to see if we take the long view, and indicate that Renoir's *retour aux sources* late in life was a reversion to the belle époque world of his childhood, which may be encountered in the biography of his father, his novel *Les Cahiers du capitaine Georges*, as well as in *French Can-Can*, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, and other films. This shift back to France—where the past became not so much a repository as a dimension—may have been as abrupt a break from his U.S. experiences and films as was *Renoir américain* from his golden period, the French 1930s.

But the French 1930s themselves were not a seamless unity. Renoir's output during this period was enormous. He made fifteen films from *On purge bébé* in 1931 to *The Rules of the Game* in 1939—the others were *La Chienne* (1931), *Night at the Crossroads* (1932), *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932), *Chotard and Company* (1933), *Madame Bovary* (1934), *Toni* (1935), *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (1936), *La Vie est à nous* (1936), *Une partie de campagne* (1936), *The Lower Depths* (1936), *The Grand Illusion* (1937), *The Marseillaise* (1938), and *La Bête humaine* (1938). Renoir was prodigiously creative. There were eight films between 1936 and 1939 alone. But look how *varied* as well as prodigious this output was, and think back again to how very different *The Rules of the Game* is from *The Grand Illusion*. If we restrict our attention to just these two films, as we must, it does nothing to derogate Renoir's status to indicate that, on the one hand, neither film could have been made by anyone else,

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and that, on the other hand, they are very different, very distinct films. Each, that is to say, has to it a singularity that is all its own; and it is these singularities these two fine mongraphs bring to the fore. Keith Reader and Julian Jackson have put all of us who love Renoir in their debt.

Each of them has much to teach even to a repeat viewer who takes pride in his or her prior knowledge of and acquaintanceship with Renoir's films. I did not know, for instance, that (as Reader recounts) Alain Resnais said that his first viewing of *The Rules of the Game* was "the most overwhelming experience I have had in the cinema in my whole life," and that on emerging from the cinema he walked the streets of Paris for two hours, feeling that "everything had been turned upside down, all my ideas about the cinema had been challenged" (1). (Claude Chabrol and François Truffaut had similar reactions, as did countless other viewers too.) Nor did I know that Jacques Lacan, no less, had called attention to Robert de la Chesnaye's "derisory and disturbing rictus of ecstasy" once his *limonaire* (or fairground organ) is unveiled at the Château for his guests (68). (These words, I suspect, could not have been better put.) Reader also quotes André Bazin (about whom he is in general scrupulously fair) to telling effect. Bazin compared Renoir's camera in the post–*chasse* part of the film to "an invisible guest, wandering about the salon and the corridors with a certain curiosity, but without any more advantage than its invisibility" (25). These words, too, are hard to beat—but Reader, memorably, caps them with words of his own, with the observation about this same camera's "slightly edgy aplomb."

Julian Jackson freely admits that *The Grand Illusion* is "an easier film to appreciate than *La Règle du jeu*," partly, he thinks, because it "drew more than any of his previous films on [Renoir's] personal experiences" (9–10). He observes also that "Renoir's fascination with de Boëldieu and von Rauffenstein almost turns them into heroes" (79), as indeed it does; he does not add, however, that Rauffenstein's clipping of the geranium in his quarters is more mawkish than any other gesture, any other moment in the film. What, then, is the illusion of the title? Jackson proffers several candidates; "the illusions of friendship, . . . of peace, . . . of love (will Maréchal really go back to Elsa?), the illusion that 1914–8 was the last war . . . the illusion of frontiers" (104). This last-named might have given him pause, for when Maréchal and Rosenthal cross into Switzerland ("*soviel besser für Euch* [so much the better for them]," says the German guard) it is noteworthy that there is no frontier, no border, to be seen, just two men in long shot on a snow-covered field.

But whatever the illusion of the title may have been, it is certain that Renoir by the time he made *The Rules of the Game* in 1939 was a very disillusioned man. In Reader's words, "*La Grande Illusion* redeems its mourning for an era of spontaneity and fraternity . . . through its solidarity, however circumstantial and temporary, between Maréchal and Rosenthal at the end. The narrative of *La Règle du jeu* offers no such redemptive possibility . . . Its merriment is . . . that of those who do not know, or choose not to see, that they are 'dancing on a volcano'" (14–15).

What links the two films is that neither of them is a star vehicle, but a collective product (the courtyard in *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* extended through time?). Each has the feel of an ensemble piece, but each is a distinctive *kind* of ensemble piece, which does not admit of being reduced to any other ensemble piece. ("When I make a film," Renoir—that least disembodied of men—once famously said, "I am asking others to influence me.") In *The Rules of the Game*, everyone except Schumacher and Lisette is, bizarrely, cast against type, but this doesn't seem to matter at all. Best of all, we have Renoir himself as Octave. As Reader, again nicely, puts it, "Octave's staging of his own failure is also Renoir's staging of his own triumph" (71). Octave is the *meneur de jeu* who is set apart and fails to fit, the *dangereux poète*, the observer-from-within, the "wild card" (as Reader calls him), the go-between, the manipulator *manqué* who cannot escape the disguise he has assumed without the help of the other participants in the *comédie*, help which no one wishes to provide. That *tout le monde a ses raisons* is precisely what's terrible. "The decline of the old aristocracy had been a matter for regret in *La Grande Illusion*, set nearly a quarter of a century before," in Reader's words. "By the time of *La Règle du jeu*, that class's manners and conventions have become a risible and etoliated shadow of their former selves" (66).

These two books, which would grace any Renoir lover's bookshelf, are labors of love. And so they should be. Neither Julian Jackson nor Keith Reader, I should fondly imagine, would in any way dissent from the idea that Renoir, whose own best films are themselves labors of love, should at this point be allowed to carry us out: for he knew the strange forms that love can take. We need only think once again about Robert de la Chesnaye's mechanical birds and (the *pièce de résistance*) his *limonaire*.

PAUL THOMAS teaches politics at the University of California, Berkeley.

BOOK DATA Julian Jackson, *La Grande Illusion*. London: BFI Publishing, 2009. $14.95 paper. 96 pages.

Keith Reader, *La Règle du jeu*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2010. $24.50 paper. 128 pages.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

HISTORY *Film Quarterly* was founded in 1958 by the University of California Press and can thus claim to be the longest-running critical film magazine in the United States. The first issue was volume 12, number 1 because the new publication reincarnated two previous periodicals: *Hollywood Quarterly* (1945–51) and its follow-up, the *Quarterly of Film, Radio, and Television* (1951–57). The founding editor was Ernest Callenbach, who remained at the helm for thirty-three years. Ann Martin suceeded him in 1991 and steered *Film Quarterly* until 2005.

Film Quarterly is best described as a scholarly magazine, blending research and intelligent journalism, aimed at both specialist and general readers. *Film Quarterly* maintains strong ties with academic Film Studies nationwide (and internationally), as well as with other disciplines where film study thrives, but its intellectual agenda is independent.

Those interested in learning more about the evolution of the journal's editorial character can consult the archive of back issues on JSTOR (www.jstor.org). Two historical overviews are also recommended: the introduction by Brian Henderson to *Film Quarterly: Forty Years—An Introduction* (University of California Press, 1999), edited by Henderson and Ann Martin, and "Da Capo" by Ernest Callenbach, an essay published in the fiftieth anniversary issue (fall 2008). "Da Capo" is available online, together with several pieces from every recent issue as well as web exclusives, at www.filmquarterly.org.

In 2007, the layout of *Film Quarterly* was redesigned in order to accommodate shorter forms of writing (alongside reviews and features), notably columns and reports on festivals or urban film scenes. The rationale was summarized in the fall 2007 editorial: "The new formats . . . are meant to enhance *Film Quarterly*'s appeal to people who think seriously about movies, whether they do so inside or outside the academy. The crucial premise is that readability can be increased without compromising intellectual rigor—for surely compact lucidity, and indeed eloquence, are intellectual virtues."

The current, London-based editor works closely with the book review editor, who commissions dozens of reviews each year, and with members of the editorial board—distinguished scholars from several disciplines who help shape the journal's policies and also provide reader reports.

SUBMISSIONS *Film Quarterly* has a core group of contributors—writers-at-large, the chief book critic, columnists, members of the editorial board—and also welcomes submissions from writers, whether newcomers or veteran critics, striving to address a wide audience. Writing skill (or promise) and suitability are what matter, not institutional status or formal qualification.

Submissions are invited in the following categories: career overviews (4000–6000 words); round-up articles encompassing several films or filmmakers—especially articles which cover documentary or digital technology (4000–6000); interviews with filmmakers (2000–5000); reviews of newly released films or DVDs (2500–3500); opinion pieces, especially arguments about the state of film criticism or polemical responses to new films (1500–2500); festival or city reports (2000); book reviews (900). Please consult recent issues for examples of each format.

Inquiries about, and submissions of, book reviews should be addressed directly to Matthew H. Bernstein (mbernst@emory.edu—review copies should be mailed by publishers to: Matthew H. Bernstein, Emory University, Film Studies Department, 109 Rich Building, 1602 Fishburne Drive, Atlanta GA 30322).

All other submissions, pitches, and inquiries should be sent electronically to the editor (fq.submissions@gmail.com). The submitted piece or proposal must not be under consideration by another publication or submitted elsewhere until (in the event that the editor does not take the proposal forward) thirty days after submission to *Film Quarterly*. If the submission is part of a larger project, such as a forthcoming book, this should be stated in the covering remarks.

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Rob White (editor)